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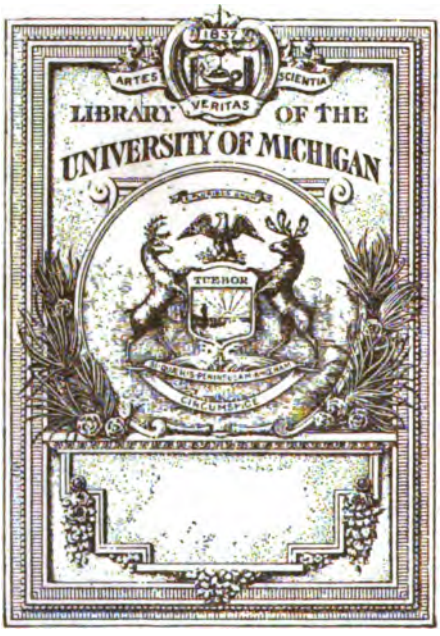
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CAMILLA

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

GEORGE MANDEVILLE'S HUSBAND

THE OPEN QUESTION

THE DARK LANTERN

THE MAGNETIC NORTH

THE CONVERT

COME AND FIND ME

THE FLORENTINE FRAME

THE MILLS OF THE GODS

MY LITTLE SISTER

WAY STATIONS

CAMILLA

CAMILLA

BY

ELIZABETH ROBINS
Author of "The Florentine Frame,"
"My Little Sister," etc.

WITH FRONTISPIECE BY
C. ALLAN GILBERT

NEW YORK
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1918

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DEDICATORY NOTE

DEAR M. Z. H.:

I shall not have to remind you that the idea of this book came to me under your roof.

You were the first to hear of it. You were first, not only in welcoming, but in helping me (in the press of other claims) to guard from extinction the small veering flame of the new impulse.

Hardly, I think, can a "quiet" book ever have been written under conditions of distraction more clamorous. For the days of its beginning were the days when, after sixteen months of war, we at home in England were facing at last the fact that not only was the war leaving no life untouched in its hopes and human relationships, but was to leave no life unaltered in its material conditions and its daily round.

I have often wondered whether, without your help, I could have done my infinitesimal fragment of the common task, let alone done anything beside. For, remember, those were days when the reverberations of the guns of Flanders reached even to English gardens—destroying their immemorial Peace; days when the comer to town found, more and more, the prevalent khaki of London streets slashed with hospital blue; and even, as I well remember, met such a sight as those great posters —how lavish they look in the retrospect! yet how inadequate to set forth the height and depth of the implication—*A Zeppelin Raid on London!* Those were the days when newspapers and Authority in private left off telling us: England is impregnable. We heard, instead, how to destroy supplies and drive off cattle, in the event of a landing raid on the coast. We heard the

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uses of the gas mask preached as protection against a bomb from the blue—preached to such purpose that the chemists had to set up window signs: *Masks sold out.*

That was a London ill-provided, as yet, with anti-aircraft device. Even when defence was less a hope and more of a reality, what promise was there for an interlude of writing, after the exhaustion of hours heavy with the sights and sounds of broken men? However slight one's share in service, not without help could one turn from the great common preoccupation to a story which had nothing to do with war, but was yet concerned, as we agreed, with things that would still be of moment when wars were done.

Always for you and me the "calm Camilla" will conjure up sights and sounds of the great Struggle; of being waked by the bugle-call over the way; breakfasting to the drill sergeant's explosive shouts; keeping the time of marching feet; seeing soldiers off to the front; seeing the ambulances bring the wounded home.

Many things will grow dim for you and me before we forget those minutes when—instead of the blessing of sleep a reasonable time after "lights out" sounded—would come the loud enemy with crash on crash, and boom on boom, shaking your vine-clad house and sending its inhabitants obedient to the basement.

If ever I catch you vaunting "the law-abiding English" I shall remind you how in despite of high authority you basely deserted your household, herded in supposed safety below; how, in the top story before the wide-flung casement, I found you, looking up at that unforgettable portent; that great bolster of battleship-grey moving miraculous through the paler grey of cloud masses over South-west London. It hung there . . . it moved to the north-west; it hesitated. It seemed to think out a plan while the heavier clouds rolled over it, obscuring the outline for a breath or two.

"It's gone!" we said. And then, there it was again!

descending; halting; careening a little, and again moving upward, while below its disappearing bulk a red star flamed and fell.

The sliming upward, through and over clouds, of that swollen slug of battle-grey remains an impression as haunting as the burst of the star bomb and sight of the desolation on the morrow.

Evening after evening following on crowded day, we have sat in the vine-clad house, turning our thoughts from intolerable reality by the aid of a fiction. So, then, let me confess that even if this book shall cheer nor divert no other mind, thanks to you, it helped me—dare I say it helped us?—to a kind of air-raid shelter for the mind.

You are fertile in resource. Yourself immersed in war-work now, your new way when the maroons call, is to sit in some cellary place companioned by other "Allies." Not an American woman now, but a Russian Grammar and a newer friend; yet, I dare swear, with the old courage and the old quiet all unchanged. For I must always think of you as a type of that steadfastness for which, long years, I have loved your people.

What is it but that same stay which buttresses the broken world?—gives the nations cohesion for the present task, and for the future hope, faith?

Take then, my story of small steadfastness, in return for your great one.

E. R.

London, May, 1918.

CAMILLA

PART I

CAMILLA IN ENGLAND

CHAPTER I

NOW it happened for the second time in London.
It had happened before in Florence.
It had happened in Paris.

The attractive but somewhat inexpressive American, Mrs. Leroy Trenholme, made a new friend; and, by the same token, made a whole new circle of friends. Victims, as they later explained, not of the woman's grace and good looks, not—oh, not at all!—of her manifest wealth. Victims of her quiet manners. A kind of tranquillity that trapped you.

Then the discovery.

"We took you for a widow."

"I never said I was a widow."

"You dressed like one."

"Not like an American widow. I may, I suppose, wear black for my father."

But her general air had been not so much the usual air of the quiet young widow as, you might say, a realization of the commonly unattainable ideal of that state.

She smiled, she gave and accepted the forms of pleasure, all with an apparent hope that she might recapture something she had lost, and never for a moment succeeding. You could no more say she cultivated sorrow, than you could say she cultivated people. She showed a positive genius for evading advances. Such friends as she eventually made seemed to be made against her will, or

rather against her intention. Yet the quality of those finally accepted pointed to fastidiousness in selection.

That was the trouble, as Alice St. Amant told her frankly. "There are masses of nice, amusing people—especially abroad—who don't mind—" she was quick to answer Camilla's look. "*Exactly.* Those people who 'don't mind' you don't care for. I've noticed that. The whole trouble," she threw in with a humorous twist of her wide mouth—"the whole trouble, dearest, is the kind of people you make friends with."

"You are the wrong kind?"

"We are the kind that doesn't go in for divorce."

Camilla Trenholme knew, by now, what her new ally did "go in for" as an alternative. The recollection helped her to accept the dictum of Lady St. Amant's mother: this Mrs. Trenholme, picked up somewhere abroad by the impetuous Alice and by Michael, most precious of sons, could not be an intimate at Nancarrow.

Nancarrow was, it seemed, not only the abode of austere virtue, but the general meeting ground of the younger generation, in particular of granddaughters.

"An awful bore," Alice said, flicking off her cigarette ash at the blazing wood fire. "It's been so nice"—she hesitated an instant as her eyes made quick circuit of the room. They sparkled back at the late sunshine slanting through windows hung with sunset hues,—a Persian loom of orange and lemon, discreetly threaded with violet. In more than the usual sense, windows and fireplace "lighted" the oak-panelled room.

Alice St. Amant had already registered her laughing complaint that the beech-leaf browns and golds which predominated in the furnishing, suited the tarnished sheen of old picture frames, above all suited the glinting dusk of Camilla's hair and eyes, and the even creaminess of her unlit complexion, better than such a colour scheme could be said to "suit" other people.

"Well, I'm here most," Camilla had smiled back.

There had been times in these last weeks when the excuse hardly held. They were the times when Alice St. Amant found it more convenient to be in London than at her husband's place in Shropshire, or farther away still, at her old home, Nancarrow.

She couldn't, in point of fact, lay her hand on her heart and say she was as comfortable and happy ("as much her own mistress," she called it privately) anywhere in the world as in the house of this American she hadn't known quite two months. To recognize the finger of Fate in the situation was like finding sanction. "It was written in the stars," she said, as she lit another cigarette. "Think of the way we kept running across one another last month in Switzerland!"

Her companion did think often of that queer journey through the Engadine and southward, in the wake of the English party.

The truth was, Mrs. Trenholme, early in the pilgrimage, had found herself penetrated afresh by her own solitariness—a solitariness merely aggravated by the enforced society of her courier-maid and the hotel people. In this mood she had observed with growing interest the attractive English couple, so devotedly attached that neither seemed able to bear the other out of sight. Camilla had watched them in the reading-room turning over the French papers. If the lady so much as moved, "Where are you going?" "Only to tidy my hair—back in a moment." "Nonsense! you'll never make *your* hair tidy," in a grumbling accent which said, "Mere excuse. *I* know!" If, in spite of protest, she slipped out, in less than sixty seconds he had thrown down his paper and gone after her. They weren't either of them young (he, over forty, anyway) but in the pink of condition. You forgot his ugly face with its pale eyes, *à fleur de tête*, and his scanty black hair beginning to grey, his ill-growing moustache; you forgot all that when you watched the admirable grace of his quite perfect figure.

And when he went up the steep hotel stairs like a schoolboy two steps at a time, "*Wait* for me!" she'd cry out from the bottom like an abandoned child.

No operation of blind chance, but Camilla's new device for escaping invisible enemies, that her *Zweispänner* so constantly followed that of the English party.

The party consisted, as must not be forgotten—though that was precisely what was always happening—of a third besides the pair. An inexplicable third. A lean lady who approached fifty with an anxious face and a tightly frizzed grey bang. What she was doing in this particular *galère*—impossible to imagine. For she carried the worn stamp of the gentlewoman and, moreover, spoke as many languages as a continental hotel porter. But her companions had no need of her linguistic accomplishments. Difficult indeed to say what they had need of which this lady could supply. As to their giving her pleasure, that solution could be accepted by no one who, day by day, saw this odd travelling companion combining an apologetic air with a rigidity of carriage that suggested an extreme and dangerous brittleness: sitting in the *Zweispänner* invariably with her back to the horses and a face as brown as the dressing-bags beside her—seeming no more to expect to be spoken to than the bags did. When, unexpectedly, the others did address her, they called her Miss Blood, which sounded like a mockery of her desiccated aspect. But Miss Blood would always respond with that hurried and spasmodic smile of hers, agreeing passionately with whatever had been said.

It came about that both the English party and Camilla were delayed at Col de l'Aigle, by a fall of rock which blocked the road for twenty-four hours.

In spite of her arrival several minutes after the others, Mrs. Trenholme had been able to get the only private sitting-room. The courier-maid greatly plumed herself on this achievement. She reported with much gusto the

terrible to-do the gentleman was making about it downstairs. He was used to having all the best rooms in the place at his disposal. Mrs. Trenholme's courier-maid had ventured before this to deplore the gentleman's advantage in knowing where he meant to stop and being able to telegraph ahead. The said courier-maid had even tried to ferret out these plans. All she discovered was that telegrams met the English couple every two days addressed to "St. Amant"; and once a letter forwarded from the last place for Lady St. Amant. When Mrs. Trenholme heard not only of these discoveries, but of the "frightful scene" Sir Something, or Lord, St. Amant was making downstairs, she looked round her dingy acquisition with a melancholy sense of the perversity of Fate. Shared happiness would make even this place shine. Those people had it. Mrs. Trenholme found herself longing, more, as she herself recognized, out of boredom than good-nature, to give up the sitting-room. Partly to show how little she cared about it, partly to taste while she could the mixed pleasure of watching people so sufficient to each other, so blithely independent of all the rest of the world, she ordered her *déjeuner*-luncheon to be served in the general dining-room. On her way thither she stopped to look in the visitors' book. She had done this already in one or two other places, with the same result. No new comers set down, save herself and maid. On reaching this place, Mrs. Trenholme had done her own registering, the aforesaid maid being keen on the scent for best rooms, while everybody else was discussing the block a few miles further on. Acting upon an impulse that visited her now and then in moments of home-sickness, Mrs. Trenholme had written down her American address.

In a remote corner of the coffee room, sat Miss Blood with a book propped in front of her, pretending to read. Miss Blood never read. She sometimes wrote something in a little book she kept in her handbag.

The St. Amants came in late, glowing from a mountain walk—he, towering under the low ceiling and moving like an athlete, rude to the waiters, and even to the *maître d'hôtel,* and, for the rest, superbly negligent of everybody and everything but the fascinating lady. So fascinating, that the waiters forgave the gentleman's haughty ways, and rushed to escort the pair to Miss Blood's table. The gentleman stopped dead, appalled at this prospect. He wheeled about. "The view of the —a—" he waved a hand toward the window and said in French, "One comes to a hole like this to look at *mountains.*"

The lady nodded: "Yes, *that* table"; but she went first to Miss Blood's and stood exchanging a few friendly words. Then, still smiling and glancing about at the meagre company—a couple of German professors, a French priest and the solitary American—Lady St. Amant decided that ceremony here was out of place. She pulled off her white felt hat and showed a small, untidy head, the fair hair all the more effective for being wind-blown into a curly frame for the Greuze-like face. The gentleman gazed with an air of condescension at the wine list. She sat down with the hat in her lap, her two elbows on the table, her chin on her hands, and looked frank adoration at her companion. Her words, however, were not romantic.

"Food! Food, Lionel, or I perish!"

Quite certainly she was not young, this lady; the little lines about the wide red mouth and at the corners of her laughing eyes, those little lines somehow made her childish happiness very touching to Camilla. Oh, *they* must have the sitting-room! Not that she could bring herself to offer it. She told the proprietor to do that before she went out for a stroll. On her return she encountered the lady in the corridor.

"So very kind! And are you sure you won't mind? You're American, aren't you? Oh, I wouldn't be sure

but for the visitors' book!"—and upon that, the *maître d'hôtel* bustling upstairs to tell Madame that Monsieur, the *mari* of Madame, had sent up to request Madame to have the extreme goodness to descend at once.

English voices sounded below. The lady ran to the banisters and looked over "*Michael!*" she ejaculated with unfeigned astonishment. "The children—?"

"*They're* all right." To Camilla's ears the statement lacked some element of reassurance. But the person chiefly concerned waved a hand over the banister and turned back to say, "My brother's got through, so the road must be opened. What a pity!" She laughed and darted a look of almost confidential understanding at the person harbouring such just views on the subject of sitting-rooms. Her final word of thanks, very gracious and charming, was broken in upon by the strange voice: "Don't wait to take your things off, Alice!"—the lady's peremptory brother was coming upstairs. He stopped half-way, presenting no more than the light brown hair on the top of his head. "I've come to take you to Bavura."

"And why," said the lady hanging over the banister, "why, when I'm so comfortable here, should I go to Bavura?"

"Because"—the voice was tense and low—"your husband is there."

She reflected an instant, and then in that airy tone: "You've given me a reason for *not* going to Bavura."

"Well, you certainly can't stay here."

Camilla, who had taken refuge in her room, went back and shut the door. Then she opened her window wider. Down below a dusty travelling carriage waited. The Alpine air blew in with that tingling pine-scent that doubles all your natural forces. Over her folded arms she leaned far out—thinking, thinking. She was still there when two pieces of luggage were brought out. She drew back, but still stood at the window idly watching

the bestowal under St. Amant's superintendence. No, *he* couldn't, after all, be St. Amant. Who was he, then —flying away from the wrath of "Michael"? Miss Blood came out, hatless, with a travelling bag, and that was put in. Then Lady St. Amant appeared. And the man who couldn't be her husband handed her into the carriage! The lady's brother, his cap pulled over his eyes and the collar of his dust coat turned up, came hurriedly out of the hotel and got in beside the lady. The other gentleman climbed up to the box seat. The lady waved a gay farewell to poor abandoned Miss Blood. "Don't forget to bring the walking sticks!"

Camilla turned from the window wondering.

The courier-maid, too, had heard the new gentleman call the other man Harborough.

"I always thought there was *something*," said the courier-maid.

. . . . . .

Eight weeks later Alice, puffing cigarette smoke at Camilla's ceiling, pointed out that the finger of Fate was plainly "in it," or why, after posting about in little places most people never heard of, should they all turn up at Lugano?"

Camilla confessed then that somebody at the hotel had said the other travellers had gone to Lugano, "and I—I couldn't think of any other place. Then, too, I wanted to go where I wouldn't need that courier-maid."

"Why?" Alice paused an instant in her envisagement of more important issues to say: "*We* thought that woman a treasure. Lionel and I both said how competent she was."

"She didn't have a nice mind, that maid."

"Who expects a servant," Alice demanded, "to have a nice mind?"

"I do," said Camilla.

"Well, any way," Alice persisted, still on the track of occult stellar influences, "the hotel people may have put

Lugano into your head, but that doesn't explain why you and Michael and I should all go to that *al fresco* dinner at the Santafedes'."

"Everybody," said Camilla, "who goes to Lugano, dines at the Santafedes'."

"I'd like the Santafedes to hear you say so."

The English wife of the well-known Neapolitan would not have been pleased, little as the lady studied conventions. She made her own. The land of her adoption had become a cult with her. You might abuse England, if you were so foolish as to wish to. But you were not to criticize Italy. Nothing there but was perfect and, at need, under the Contessa's personal protection, from the beggars in the streets (such dears!) to the Botticellis on the walls, and the fireflies in the evening dusk.

Mrs. Leroy Trenholme had won the Contessa's heart by restoring to a certain little church, in a village on the Santafede estates an altar-piece which had been stolen ten years before and sold in America. Besides being a fine example of early Siennese art, it owned some special quality of simplicity and tenderness which greatly endeared it to Camilla.

The winter before the Swiss journey, chance found Mrs. Trenholme at the ravished shrine. When she heard the picture described she was seized by a guilty conviction that the missing altar-piece was at that moment in her London house.

She said nothing about this till she had returned to London, called a council of experts, and made sadly sure.

Naturally, the woman who had restored the lost altar-piece was a welcome guest of the Santafedes as soon as they learned of her presence in their summer haunt.

Alice St. Amant, to her momentary discomfiture, found the American there one evening. A slender figure in filmy black, standing out with great distinctness against the white and gold of the Santafedes' *salon de réception.*

Lady St. Amant, critically observant even in that moment of embarrassment, said to herself, "It's where even the Frenchwoman fails." No one could "do" with mourning what these Americans could.

The encounter was distinctly *mal-à-propos*. However, Alice instantly made up her mind that the previous meeting should be clothed in a decent oblivion. She had never seen this person before, and to make the fact quite clear she turned her back.

Lady St. Amant had come with her brother, Mr. Michael Nancarrow. They stood talking with their host. The lady was past-mistress in the art of covert observation. This young Transatlantic widow (apart from the notorious American pushing-ness which had made her scrape acquaintance through the device of the sitting-room) was a person whom, in the absence of Lionel Harborough, you—naturally, if you were Alice St. Amant—found pique your curiosity. Just as the severe distinction of the black gown detached the woman from the many-coloured throng, so something in temperament, or upbringing, seemed to set her apart from the company. Being an American was not sufficient to account for this, as Alice had long ago learned. Evidence, to point the fact was even on hand tonight: vivacious, *chic*, shrill, intensely "in it."

While affecting to join Michael's talk with Count Santafede, Alice kept adding to her mental notes. She watched the hostess presenting people to the American, she saw the way they were received. The woman seemed not to know that Americans are expected to be "chatty." She let the conversation fall, let the most interesting people drift away. And when she'd gone and done it, didn't seem to realize what she'd gone and done. Stupid. But a gift of standing silent amid talk and laughter, without seeming to mind . . . was it possible she was just as pleased to be let alone?

Satisfied now that the woman wasn't going to claim

acquaintance (and Alice flattered herself that practice had rendered her expert in detecting these signs) she was relieved from any need to regard this person in relation to herself. The more free, therefore, to try her hand at plucking out the heart of the stranger's little mystery. The outer expression of the said mystery, was it aloofness? Yes, that was it! But, if Alice was any judge, the aloofness came as little from a mistaken idea of the woman's own importance as from a too simple-minded conception of other people's. It was more, Lady St. Amant decided, a lack of confidence—yet not in herself, you would say. She hadn't the air of being preoccupied with herself. The confidence she lacked was confidence in other people. Yes—that was what it meant!—that look of being on her guard against encroachment.

And now a general movement in the big room as people were told about the plan of dining out of doors, and who was to bring whom. The host stood a moment looking back at his wife before leading off with Lady St. Amant. A military personage with a foreign order was bringing the American. In a little pause she answered some question, and upon the sound of that distinct overseas speech —Alice recalled now the look on her brother's face as he broke off in the middle of a sentence and turned round: "Mrs. Trenholme! Where did you drop from?"

Michael must have known her well. He was heard to ask how Uncle Paxton was. Alice kept a discreet back turned on the lady, revolving many matters in her mind with great rapidity.

As they all made their way through the moonlit gardens to the table spread among the lantern-hung ilexes, Alice heard her brother say, with unwonted effusiveness, "Isn't this glorious?"

"Charming—yes."

"Why do you say it like that?"

"Well—a little operatic, don't you think?"

"Oh," he mocked, "I know what *you're* thinking of!"

She lifted her eyes as if to challenge his boast, and then convicted: "Yes, my raggety Florida."

As the groups narrowed into twos, filing down the path, Alice of set intent close behind her brother, heard him in a fatuous tone make the infantile-sounding remark: "Piney woods! Do you ever think of the piney woods?"

"I mustn't," the lady answered, with unnecessary firmness. "Makes me homesick!"—Oh, even before dinner they were "getting on." Afterwards, the host led Mrs. Trenholme toward the podere to see the fireflies among the corn. Alice waited and waylaid Michael. "What were you two laughing at just now?" He couldn't think at first, and then, "Oh, it must have been Aunt Keziah."

"You seem to know a great many of her relations." But it turned out Aunt Keziah was an old coloured woman. At some further question Michael, with that touch of reserve Alice knew so well, had said, "I don't know *any*thing really about her or her relations. And what does it matter any way?" Whereupon he had promptly rejoined the lady among the olive trees. Yes, they sat together after dinner out there among the olive trees, with the fireflies blinking their golden astonishment.

Alice was astonished too. The more so when she learned it was years ago that Michael had run across the lady, over there in Florida, that time he'd gone tarpon-fishing with Bethune. Mrs. Trenholme's husband had a place "down there." Or perhaps it was her place. Michael didn't know. "And what was the husband like?" "Oh, not a bad chap for a millionaire."

"You hadn't seen her since her husband's death?"

"I tell you I never saw her but that time in America—five years ago."

As the days went on and they all got into the habit of meeting regularly, Alice realized that Michael—yes, if you please, *Michael!* with his nerves of leather—was quite "jumpy" about Mrs. Trenholme. He didn't mind your saying she was dull. "I don't call her specially clever myself," he'd say with quite a pleased air. But if you began to talk too intimately about her "points," he'd change the conversation, or get up and leave the room. Michael!

All four, Alice, Mrs. Trenholme, Michael and Lord Harborough, travelled home together.

England was home now to Mrs. Trenholme, too, though she had been a householder there for barely fifteen months. When she admitted to a new acquaintance that she had no talents, she should have excepted housekeeping. Her house was not only "very well done," as they say, it was quite as well ordered and kept. People who didn't know her well were prompt with, "Of course!" Just as she could afford to pay for the most sought-after pictures and prints and Venetian glass, so she could afford to pay for quite perfect service. But the truth was that her admirable servants cost her less than indifferent ones cost her friends. Any special pains she took about servants lay in the choice of them. She explained what she wanted and left them to themselves. She happened to be one of those whom people like to work for.

. . . . . .

After being made extremely comfortable at Queen Anne's Gate, Lady Alice and her brother could but represent, on their return to Cumberland, the suitability of asking their new friend to Nancarrow.

The fire of shrewd questions from old Mrs. Nancarrow—brave as she was, she dared not level them at Michael—were gallantly met by her daughter.

"First of all"—Mrs. Nancarrow fixed a penetrating eye on her interlocutor—"is Michael in love with the woman?"

"Well, he liked her awfully—" Alice presented certain small but significant pieces of contributory evidence. These induced thoughtfulness in Mrs. Nancarrow.

With anything approaching careful handling it would, in Alice's opinion, "be all right."

There was no need for her to point out the desirableness, on the whole, of Michael's marrying a childless widow "richly left," since his elder brother had a quiver full (four boys and two girls) and all too little string to his bow. In plain English, without help in the expensive matter of suitably educating his sons, Colonel George Nancarrow, K.C.S.I., D.S.O., of the 10th Hussars serving in India, would almost certainly be forced to let the family place. This contingency might be faced by a man who spent so much of his life abroad, but it was a spectre in his mother's eyes, and one of the few before which she blenched.

Lady St. Amant, herself with expensive tastes, a husband who spent far too much on the Turf, and with three daughters about to come out, as she said, "one on top of another"—Lady St. Amant, too, would find a millionaire sister-in-law "fit in" very well. If Queen Anne's Gate could be induced to open sufficiently wide to admit "the girls"—what a spring-board from which to jump into the London swim! Great fun for Camilla, too, Lady St. Amant decided, to have all that young life going on about her. The future had brightened perceptibly since the Lugano days—but no word of that now. The situation was dealt with solely from the point of view of what would be best for Michael, apple of his mother's eye. If the truth, however harsh, was ever deliberately withheld from Mrs. Nancarrow, it was with no view of sparing *her*. Why this was, you had only to see her to realize by a score of indications. Nothing frail and but little grace in her high-shouldered angularity—a something of physical as distinguished from her mental decisiveness which you understood better when you knew she had been

a famous horsewoman in her day. Even now, at sixty-five, she drove her own ponies and sometimes rode about the estate. As her tenants descried her in the distance: "Ay, ye'll be hearin' the truth from t'owd wumman!" they would say, half in warning, half in pride. They were used to, they thought they understood, that air of uncompromising directness.

The air was misleading. Mrs. Nancarrow was much less direct than people thought.

"How old do you say she is?"

"Looks twenty-six. Says she's 'nearly thirty.'"

"Then she's thirty-five," said Mrs. Nancarrow with decision.

"Oh, do give me leave to know a little something!"

"Has Michael said anything to her yet?"

"Not so far as I can gather. You know, under that frank manner Michael is the most reticent being alive." She touched lightly on her mother's various plans for him in the past. One and all had come to just nothing. Michael had passed his thirty-sixth birthday and, so far as anybody knew, no woman had ever touched him yet, unless this American— "I rather think," Alice said diplomatically, "that he's waiting till he can see what she'd be like at Nancarrow."

"That's sensible, at any rate—if it's true." What assurance had they as to the woman's financial position?

Alice presented the grounds for the faith that was in her.

But Mrs. Nancarrow was not easily satisfied. She asked questions Alice had no answer for.

Mrs. Nancarrow's point was of greater importance even than appeared on the surface.

Life owed something to Michael Nancarrow. His sacrifice in giving up the Navy had been softened for him by the ever-growing and, up to now, undivided passion of his life, his love for Nancarrow. Most unexpectedly the sailor son had made an ideal country squire and

Master of Foxhounds. He developed the land. The farms on the estate looked up. He was now afforesting a large tract, and when the wrench should come and he should have to resign Nancarrow to his elder brother, or to the anticipated tenant, Colonel George would find the value of his inheritance enhanced.

The heart of his mother's desire to see Michael married and settled, was to see him settled at Nancarrow, able even after her death and the division of her jointure to go on living at the old place.

"You appear," Mrs. Nancarrow gave a slight swing to the lace lappets that fell down either side of her lantern jaws—"you appear to have found out very little."

Alice was annoyed by such ingratitude. The little that she knew she had been obliged to glean from Camilla. And Camilla was not an expansive person.

This fact was in the lady's favour, as you might gather from the swing of lace lappets in a different direction. For the rest, though Mrs. Trenholme seemed well enough now, she had, according to Alice, been delicate as a child. All her winters somewhere in the South. Then boarding school. Then she married.

The name Leroy kept on cropping up. As to that gentleman, Lady St. Amant had been so little successful in eliciting information that she was obliged, out of consideration for Mrs. Nancarrow, to invent a little.

"How long has he been dead?"

"Three years," Alice answered promptly; and then, to guard against committing herself further, she explained it wasn't easy to catechize a woman like Camilla Trenholme about the man she was still mourning, behind that wall of gentle reticence.

"Can't you *see?*" she burst out. "It was bad enough for her to be thinking so much about the defunct. We didn't *want* her talking about him too. Much better for her and everybody to forget Leroy."

"You don't even know what he was; how he made his—"

"He didn't make it. Inherited most of it—or inherited the land that Western town is built on. What's its name?—near Duluth. Anybody who knows Duluth knows the Trenholmes."

"Who *does* know Duluth? I don't believe there is such a place."

"But I'm telling you the Trenholmes were bankers before the Duluth days. It was Duluth that made them millionaires." And here was the motor car to take her back to the station.

What, in fine, Alice St. Amant thought of the matter might, she herself pointed out, be judged from the fact of her postponing her return to her own home and coming hot-foot all this way to explain the situation to her mother.

"Michael could never have done it—men are such geese—especially Michael—about things of this sort. If you'll clinch Camilla's visit I'll come back and see you through it. Now I must fly to the bosom of my family. Lord, how I hate Shropshire!"

CHAPTER II

ON a late September afternoon, crisp, high-coloured for the fell-country, Michael Nancarrow met the lady and her maid, at a little station miles away from anywhere. Camilla found it as characteristic of England as it was all unlike her own land, that the long express train should be stopped here by special request to accommodate the guest of a private house. "Just remind the guard," Mr. Nancarrow had written, "though it will no doubt be all right, for I shall telephone them in the morning."

As the train slowed, Camilla looked out. He was on the platform with a groom at his heels. She smiled for some reason as she followed his quick look, darting into the recesses of each first-class carriage and then quickly on, penetrating the next, and on again—all so swiftly done it was like watching the flicker of a cinematograph, till at last "Ah!" and the forward swoop to claim her. His face was more than welcome. It was possession.

The sudden violence of her heart-beating was soothed by the pleasant matter-of-factness in his "How do you do? This way. Your maid and Bickley here will look after the luggage—" and Camilla was out of the station into the car, whirling along by his side.

In a lonely road that had steeply climbed the fell-side, he pointed across a ribbon of river to Nancarrow, set grey and beautiful above a little village.

Till this vision brought "Oh-h!" and "Tell me . . ." to Camilla's lips, she had said almost nothing and he very little—bare commonplaces. Had she had a good journey? Was she sure she was warm?—and a rearrangement of fur rugs.

An extraordinary inner happiness possessed them. It took the form in him of a strong assurance. *This* was

what he had waited for all these years! Now it had come—come home. He forgot for the moment that he hadn't yet put this into words.

To Camilla the hour brought a sense of unreality, a consuming wonder—a wonder that drank her breath. She battled more consciously against that sense of breathlessness than against anything else. What will he think, if I have to speak? And if she should speak, or so much as move suddenly, would Michael and the car vanish like Cinderella's coach? She sought safety in motionless silence—a stillness like that of a being under a spell—till that first sight of Michael's home.

"Mainly Tudor," he said in a commonplace tone, "though there's a bit left of the Elizabethan house that was burned."

"And who are those up on the Tower—looking out for you?"

He laughed. "I was waiting for that. They are looking out for my enemies—those turbulent fellows over the Scottish Border." And then she heard that the figures up there against the sky, grown clearer now in their attitude of fantastic ferocity, were men of stone, keeping their ancient watch. Only three of them left. The sentinel on the East had "gone below" into the same oblivion that enfolded his flesh-and-blood opponents of long ago.

With her eyes on the massive square of the tower: "I love the Elizabethan part," she said.

But that wasn't the Elizabethan part. That was a "pele" and older still. He told her what these strong towers had stood for in old days, not only to the people who lived in them, but to the people who lived round about. Then, more she felt because the chauffeur was there than because she was, a mock-heroic description of an "early English" master of Nancarrow, dressed in leather and bronze, gathering the countryside into the chamber above the ground floor: "Bitter cold and hor-

ribly smelly." For all the precious cattle would be in the vaulted hall underneath, driven into safety there at the first warning. Drawbridge up, bowmen at every lancet and the watch on the tower—"all complete" even to the priest in his tiny cell. If such things interested her, Mrs. Trenholme could see the stone altar still.

If such things interested her!

She had seen the castles of northern Europe and the palaces of Italy. But that first glimpse of Nancarrow Tower, its crenellations sharp against the September sky, had brought a sudden rush of undefined emotion, a feeling new to her which she was to understand better very soon.

As they ran through Nancarrow village Michael turned into your practical modern administrator. Here was the new village hall, just finished. Those cottages he'd rebuilt.

Camilla's eyes were on the little church. "And that has a stout tower, too."

"Yes, Norman. And a Jacobean rood screen—rather good, they say. Some brasses that people were always wanting to get rubbings of. Charles Heathcote will love explaining it all to you. Charles Heathcote is our local antiquary." He was also, it appeared, just by the way, the parson. And more particularly "a cousin of ours."

"A cousin!" she repeated, and then brought out one of those remarks that made people call her stupid. "What a queer chance that your cousin should happen to have a church so close!"

She was told that a cousin "usually got the living." It was in the gift of Nancarrow.

"You mean you can have whoever you like?"

"Well, when the living's vacant, whoever has Nancarrow makes the appointment."

Mrs. Trenholme concealed her boundless astonishment.

She noticed that though her host did not speak to nor even seem to notice the few villagers in the single street,

their fresh country faces turned friendly looks upon him. As they neared the park gates, "We are just ourselves till tomorrow," he told her in his negligent English.

"And tomorrow?"

"One or two people coming to shoot."

The tall iron gates were opened by a white-haired woman. Michael nodded as they rushed through.

"What a pleasant face!" said Camilla.

He agreed. One of his oldest friends. "She's been at Nancarrow longer than I have. Born in the lodge, there."

The car swung round the last curve. Straight before them rose the façade. She glanced at the severe entrance. What was it going to be like?

"Alice—she's here?"

No; Alice had telegraphed to say she'd missed the connection. A later train would bring her in time for dinner.

Camilla's heart beat faster again, yet she could hardly have said whether she was relieved or anxious, as she figured to herself the first hours alone with Michael and his mother.

She was the more surprised to find some dozen persons of all ages gathered in the drawing-room, at a table long and narrow like a ship's board.

"My mother," Michael was saying.

From behind the tea urn the grey-haired woman with the square shoulders put out a hand, the left still busied with the sugar tongs. "How do you do?" and then, without a pause, to a youth at her side, "Another, Alec? Would you," she went on, turning again to the stranger, "would you like to go up to your room first—or will you have tea?"

Michael, engineering some movement of chairs, answered for her. "Oh, tea first, don't you think? Yes," he decided, "tea, by all means."

"Then where will Mrs. Trenholme sit?" Mrs. Nan-

carrow looked at Camilla with Michael's eyes and brow, but she spoke with a different mouth. The lower part of the long face was rough-hewn, the chin heavy, the unmodelled lips more than a little grim. "Are you cold?"

Mrs. Trenholme said she wasn't cold. But she seemed to make no effort to disguise the fact that she was chilled. This English habit of rigid economy in introductions, and of stripping from their reception of the stranger the element of even formal geniality, struck Camilla afresh, as it did after each renewed experience of the practised graciousness of Latin peoples.

Michael pushed an armchair up to the table for her, and the guest sat down, a prey to an intensity of shyness she had not known since childhood.

"My sister-in-law, Mrs. George Nancarrow. And this is the worst-behaved of my nieces," Michael went on cheerfully. Evidently he found nothing amiss in their reception. "Anything hot left under that cover, Di?"

A footman brought in a fresh pot of tea. While Mrs. Nancarrow poured it out, she told her son that Tony had come in with the news that those Hatch boys had the whole village by the ears again.

Michael smiled. "What have the little beggars been up to now?"

A sound of suppressed laughter came from Tony's end of the table. Tony was evidently the nice boy with curly brown hair and a wide mouth full of rather pointed teeth, white and shining as a dog's. In their soft voices the young people continued some interrupted argument. It was as if even they were conscious of having their part in conveying to the stranger: "We do not make the smallest difference in our ways because of you. Whoever you may be, we shall not by any manner of means forget that Alec Fairbairn takes two lumps in his tea, and that Tony is telling something intensely diverting to us which is Greek to you."

Camilla was conscious of an absurd rush of gratitude towards Michael for smiling at her. She felt it more than kind, it was munificent in him, to give her sugar and cream.

As she sipped her tea she looked round on one of the most beautiful rooms she had ever sat in. No wonder these English loved their homes! Other peoples had their palaces and castles. Nowhere out of England would you find anything to compare with the peculiar combination of stateliness and homeliness in such a house as this.

Unlike many silent people, Camilla was no shrewd observer. But she took in certain things (and this applied in particular to states of feeling) through the pores of her skin. She felt rather than saw that while Mrs. Nancarrow held the balance in the middle, the gravity of the end of the board opposite Tony was maintained by the frog-faced lady who must be the governess. It never occurred to Mrs. Trenholme that the nice fair boy in the early twenties, discussing some match at the opposite end, was Tony Nancarrow's tutor. He was certainly no bar to the gaiety, kept at as high a level as he dared by the irrepressible Tony. Camilla found herself, too, smiling in that direction, till suddenly it occurred to her that she was being unnecessarily idiotic. For she hadn't seen the point—couldn't possibly, in a conversation so allusive, catch even the general drift.

She forced herself to try to follow the discussion between Mrs. Nancarrow and her son. Chancing to catch Camilla's eye, "Hatch," Michael explained, in his single effort to carry Camilla along—"Hatch is an undergamekeeper."

"And my brother-in-law's particular pet!" said young Mrs. George, dimpling and laughing as though she had said something witty.

"Oh!" said Mrs. Trenholme with equal brilliancy, and proceeded to take off the cobweb tulle veil she had worn

under the motor wrappings and which till now had been merely turned up to her eyebrows.

"Not so much a particular pet, as a particular good keeper," Michael insisted. "Good in the kennels too. Best all-round man on the place."

Diana exchanged understanding looks with the red-headed youth: "And Hatch doesn't adore Uncle Michael, does he? *Oh,* no!"

The laughter and the talk went on.

After unpinning her veil, Mrs. Trenholme also unbuttoned her coat and unwound a gauze scarf from her neck. She was not conscious that she presented that uncrumpled appearance after her long journey—"long" according to English standards—acquired only by those accustomed to journeys longer still. Nothing could be plainer than the black cloth gown with the cambric tunic under the severe coat. No ornament whatsoever. The "note" was that simple neatness which is one of the least simple things in the world, as it is one of the most expensive. The covert looks that had followed Mrs. Trenholme's movements made her wonder with an absurd sharpness of anxiety what was wrong with her. She surprised criticism in the quickly removed glance of the frog-faced person they called Miss Colby. Camilla might almost have heard that lady's cautious aside to the schoolgirl sitting next her.

"I don't trust a woman whose hair is like that after nine hours in the train and a drive in an open motor."

Without these causes contributory to dishevelment, Miss Colby's sandy wisps would to the end of the chapter be guiltless of looking "like that."

Inside the neat dark head the thought took shape, "Since they didn't want me, why did they ask me?"

No one would have suspected that she was growing more shy moment by moment. That unwinding of the scarf had been the last effort of an ebbing mobility. She

had come to the point at which she was doubtful, however hungry she might have been, whether she could have put out her hand for a piece of bread and butter. For hers was the form of shyness which, making little or no show on the surface of the victim, works its way, so to say, under the skin. The muscles become taut as though under some excessive physical strain. She knew of old, she hoped she had outgrown, this sensation as of locked jaws, of lower ribs pressing hard against the stricture of clothing. The time which seemed so long was a matter of only a few moments, while Mrs. Nancarrow launched her final—for the time being—objurgations of the language those Hatch boys had used. Camilla's inner misery had blurred the edges of the talk, not, at best, very luminous for her; still, she realized that the discussion had somehow caught up and become entangled with Charles Heathcote. That the Hatch boys had fallen foul of "Cousin Charles" seemed to complicate things for Michael. The Hatches might be unruly in Sunday School; they might, as Mrs. Nancarrow declared, have introduced a spirit of insubordination in the village unknown since History began; but they couldn't be allowed to cheek His Reverence, as Michael called him. Did anybody know what they'd said?

"*Rather!*" Tony was being begged by his sisters and cousins to "go on."

"I mustn't," he said, with a grin. He glanced, half mischievous, half wary, at his grandmother.

"Nonsense!" said his younger relations *sotto voce*. "Don't be so aggravating, Tony!"

"It isn't my fault," he said, showing his pointed teeth with delight at thought of the revelations he was discreetly withholding. "*I* don't make the laws in this house."

"I wish you'd oftener bear that in mind," said his grandmother with a good-humoured grimness. And

without troubling to alter her expression, she began to catechize Mrs. Trenholme about her knowledge of the north of England.

In the middle of one of Camilla's replies, Mrs. Nancarrow interrupted a low-voiced conversation between the red-haired youth who liked two lumps, and the two older girls, Blanche sitting next him, and Camilla's neighbour Diana, who leaned across the board to drive some argument home.

"What difference does it make?" old Mrs. Nancarrow asked sharply. "What does it matter to us *who* are letting their girls go? *Your* mothers," she added by an after-thought, catching one mother's obedient eye, "don't approve of sending young girls to Charity Balls in London hotels, to dance with Tom, Dick and Harry."

One of these "very particular" parents turned out, to Camilla's surprise, to be the absent Alice! Diana St. Amant, with a face so like her mother's, ventured to urge the charitable cause and the list of patrons.

"There are people who like posing as 'patrons,' " her grandmother returned with her nose high "and like seeing their names in print. All that has nothing to do with us, as I should think you might know without being told."

Diana accepted her drubbing meekly.

But Mrs. Trenholme had dropped her eyes. It was rude of Mrs. Nancarrow not to wait for the answer to the question she had asked her guest. Neither question nor answer was of importance, but the interruption had the same effect upon Camilla as being pushed aside in a crowd. "They find me dull," she said to herself, seized again by that constriction of shyness. She thought of this acquaintance and that—of the bizarre young Americans at the Santafedes'. "If I made an immense effort and threw off my bad habit of just sitting still—if I rattled and told anecdotes and screamed, they

would listen. They might even like me." She leaned hard against that inner sense of stricture with the thought: "Michael must see I am being a failure." And upon that, more poignant still, the anguish of homesickness: "Oh, why did I come?"

She hardly heard what Michael was saying to her or to any one. The voices beat softly on ears that retained tones and cadences, not words.

Nevertheless, in spite of inner wretchedness and without the aid of introductions, Camilla was unconsciously "getting the hang" of the party.

The youth who got two lumps, called Alec by the family, and Mr. Fairbairn by the governess, was, Camilla decided, in love with Diana St. Amant, "worst-behaved of my nieces." But the Nancarrow girl Blanche, who was a little older, thought Alec belonged to her. And so did the girls' grandmother.

They had all finished tea except Michael, who had been called away to the telephone, when the drawing-room door opened impetuously and two small boys, one a mere baby, came dancing in, followed more sedately by a girl of ten or so. The boys ran round the table to their grandmother, calling out something about a pony.

"And Michael came off two times!"

"But Sue never sat up on the pony. Just lay on her front and held on to his hair."

"His mane, I suppose you mean," said Mrs. Nancarrow in her deep voice.

The children went on chattering to her. They seemed to be on the best of terms with this ungenial woman.

"Where is Uncle Michael?" the oldest boy kept repeating.

Mrs. George, who looked far more like Blanche's sister than her mother, went over to a Sheraton cabinet and took out boxes of blocks and wooden animals. "What shall we build, children?" Down on the floor with the

little boys she sat herself—like them, rosy and fair-haired and dimpled and smiling. Camilla only now remembered that she had not heard Mrs. George say two words beyond the phrase about Hatch until that question to the children. Yet she had shed pleasant glances and sufficing smiles. You had no feeling that Mrs. George's part in the family picture was not important and fully sustained.

"Where is Uncle Michael?"—the question came again. "Oh, *there* you are!" The oldest little boy jumped up and rushed towards the door. Michael picked him up and carried him upside down the length of the room, the child laughing and all his fluffy hair falling down like a golden mop.

The tiny one also left his blocks. "Do it to me, too, Uncle Michael."

Old Mrs. Nancarrow seemed with difficulty to withdraw her eyes from the children. "Michael tells me you are fond of music," she said to the guest. "Do you ever play on two pianos?"

The form of the question puzzled Mrs. Trenholme for a moment. Then: "Oh, you mean four handed duets? No, not since I left school." The answer seemed to discourage Mrs. Nancarrow. She turned to her daughter-in-law with something about Peggy and whether her temperature had been taken. Mrs. George was setting out a Halma board for Sue's benefit. Camilla looked on—or pretended to—as they made the first moves. In reality she was absorbed in Michael's dealings with the smaller children. He was not exactly playing with them. He pretended to be in great need of another piece of toast. He made little rushes and abortive dashes at them to drive them off.

"You mustn't make them wild," his mother remonstrated with the air of a person repeating an ancient warning. They returned to the attack and climbed into his lap and on to his shoulders. He laughed and

went on crunching toast with the most beautiful teeth in the world. As she watched the group, Camilla's sense of strain vanished in the wonder of finding this man, unmarried, yet more at home with babies than Camilla had ever been in her life. It was Michael in a new light—imagination stirring. She was not pleased at hearing the boy called Michael. It was as if something had been taken away from her. With that thought in her mind, she lifted her eyes and found old Mrs. Nancarrow's on her. Camilla looked straight into them and they into hers. Michael's mother smiled. Though Camilla forgot to do the same, so absorbed was she in the new experience, in her heart she was saying, "Oh, like me a little, Michael's mother!"

"I am afraid you are tired!" he said, and Mrs. Nancarrow answered for the guest.

"Yes," she said quite kindly, "you must rest awhile." And then in that other tone she called across the room to the girl who was again monopolizing Alec: "Diana, you'll show Mrs. Trenholme her room."

Mrs. George—Camilla had already decided she was dull but nice—did not seem to recognize the desirability of removing her niece's distracting influence. "We've finished our game," she said obligingly. "I'll take Mrs. Trenholme."

"*Diana!*" the girl's grandmother repeated.

Diana came forward, flushed and with very shining eyes, while her Aunt went on insisting that she had to go up anyhow to take Peggy's temperature.

"Diana can sit awhile with her sister," said Mrs. Nancarrow with decision. She explained while Mrs. Trenholme gathered her scarf and gloves, that Alice's youngest child had been too ill to go home, and so in their mother's absence the other St. Amant girls had come to help Peggy through a tedious convalescence. "That's what they're here for," she said, with a significant glance at Diana.

Michael was at the door with some parting chaff for the "worst-behaved of my nieces," as that young person followed her Aunt and Mrs. Trenholme out of the drawing-room.

From the first landing Camilla looked back over the heads of the other two. Michael still stood there in the drawing-room door. A quick smile crossed his face. He made the faintest of little nods, as much as to say: "It's all right, all gloriously right!—trust me for it."

. . . . . .

Nevertheless Camilla went down to dinner full of perturbations. If only she could have been alone this first evening with Michael and his mother! There was something very daunting about these large English families. Michael seemed to belong so irrevocably to "his people," as he called them, and there were so many of them to belong to, that surely very little could be left over for anybody else. The feeling vanished at sight of him waiting for her down in the hall. Before she could drink deep enough of that cup of devotion he held up, Alice came running down behind them. Her appearance had the usual effect not only of "livening people up," but of making them more natural. She led the conversation; above all, she led the laughter.

Another arrival was Hilda Wilton, a highly decorative young lady whom Alice in the drawing-room after dinner explained as the daughter of an old friend of the family, Lord Maxwell Wilton. "Why did you ask? She interests you?"

Camilla hesitated: "I was wondering if she was a Nancarrow. Your brother said only the family till tomorrow."

"It hasn't got as far as *that*," Alice said with an odd look, "though I dare say some of the family are ready to think of Hilda as 'belonging.'" As if to indicate whom in particular, she glanced round at her sister-in-law, and then flew to adjust the screen between her

mother and the fire. After that she brought Mrs. Nancarrow's workbag, a thing as big as a pillow.

Young Mrs. Nancarrow, plump and pink and pleasant, in a curiously tousled evening gown—she might at least have seen that the lace was clean—sat by her mother-in-law smocking a little frock. Now and then she would offer some piece of information of an impeccable domesticity; Peggy's temperature, something one of her boys had done. Old Mrs. Nancarrow kept up this desultory conversation while she knitted a shawl on immense tortoise-shell needles and listened to everything that everybody else in the room was saying—especially, Camilla thought, to the young people chattering in groups over their coffee cups.

Alice flitted from one to the other, but finally, like a large sulphur-yellow butterfly, her chiffon-winged figure alighted on the cushioned fender.

"Come over here!" she called out to Camilla, who was looking at a strange hothouse plant set in a quite wonderful Chinese bowl. "There's no doubt," Alice went on as though there had been no hiatus in the conversation, "no doubt whatever but Hilda's a beguiler."

"I suppose so," said Camilla dully.

"You 'suppose'—!"

"Anyhow"—Camilla seemed to wake up—"she's so pretty, she oughtn't to paint."

Mrs. George Nancarrow opened her eyes very wide at this indiscretion. After a moment she got up and joined Hilda on the other side of the room.

"Bless *me!*" Alice had exclaimed, also staring, "Hilda doesn't paint. Not to say *paint*. Not any more than other people." As Camilla made no reply: "I suppose," Alice went on, "you think I oughtn't to have any eyebrows?"

Camilla's embarrassed surprise was obvious. She indulged in a fleeting shamefaced inspection.

"Hadn't you noticed?" Alice said with her rippling

laugh. "It isn't everybody who's born with neat little eyebrows like a line engraving. And having no colour, too, *that* doesn't suit everybody."

Camilla made haste to return to Hilda. "I admit"—she looked across the room—"those pink cheeks and scarlet lips *do* give a girl a-a-a—"

"Well, what do they give a girl?"

"A sort of jewelled look. Very brilliant at night."

Alice took up the word "jewelled" with enthusiasm. "That *exactly* describes it. Well, I may tell you, Hilda isn't the kind my mother usually imports—to— You can guess what for? No?" She put her mouth near Camilla's ear: "To marry Michael. Hilda's a sort of last hope."

The door opened and the men came in: Mr. Croft, the young tutor, Tony and Michael.

"*This* one—Hilda—is really Nelly's, my sister-in-law's, invention," Alice went on in her gay undertone. "Nelly *loves* Hilda. I don't love Hilda. Do you love Hilda, Michael?" she demanded as he stood in front of them.

"Alice!" said her mother. "Come here and hold my wool."

Alice St. Amant's relation to her mother was not easy to define. There was real affection between them, Camilla could see that, and there was almost constant friction.

It was clear that old Mrs. Nancarrow was proud of her daughter's wits and good looks, and responded like the rest to the something electrical in her which differentiated Alice from the others; yet the sensitive observer saw that Mrs. Nancarrow was secretly dissatisfied, secretly on the watch, secretly . . . afraid, was it of, or for, her daughter Camilla wondered?

"Well?" Alice—at her mother's knee—her thumbs upright above the taut hank, turned her head and caught Camilla's eye: "what do you make of us?"

The guest, abashed, gave a little inner gasp.

"Don't look at Michael to help you out."

"What I 'make of—'? Well, I can see *you* are very unlike the rest of your family, anyway."

There was a little burst of laughter. Even Mrs. Nancarrow smiled grimly without looking away from her wool-winding.

"Ah, you see," Alice threw in, "Camilla never knew my poor father. He was very like me."

"Nonsense!"—but Mrs. Nancarrow was drowned in renewed laughter.

"You see," Alice went on, "his grandmother was a wild Irishwoman. There she is." She lifted her audacious face to a full-length portrait of a lady standing by a great staircase, drawing on a glove, a shady hat set aslant on auburn curls, a greyhound by her side.

"Looks like a Romney," Camilla murmured.

"It *is* a Romney. But Raeburn does your real Nancarrow best."

Hilda had come drifting across the room with an aimless air, and seemed rather surprised on the whole to find herself opposite Michael. She asked some question about the shooting party. Michael had risen and was explaining.

"Michael!" Alice called out, "can't you see Camilla is dying for us to show her the pictures? Here, Hilda, you hold the wool."

Mrs. Nancarrow gave her daughter a look over her spectacles and lifted the wool off Alice's hands. "I've wound enough," she said.

"Let's show her the Sir Joshua that's just like you." Alice swept the two towards the end of the room. She had a nervous momentum that carried you along in its current. Camilla resisted it. She stood looking back at Hilda.

"Do you know them so well you aren't coming?"

Hilda wavered. Camilla waited for her.

Whether it was that, or for some less definable reason, by the time the evening was over the sentiment of the younger people at all events was plainly in favour of the new friend.

Over the candle-lighting in the hall there was competition as to who should take Mrs. Trenholme up to her room.

"Bags I take her," suggested Tony.

"Nonsense! it isn't a boy's place. *I* shall."

"Not at all! She's my mother's friend, and she's only your aunt's friend."

"That's nothing if she'd rather have me."

"*IF!*—"

They bickered gaily.

Old Mrs. Nancarrow looked on without a sign.

When the guest had gone up with Diana in her train, Alice lingered, on pretence of carrying her mother's wool-work and candlestick. With her brilliant face tilted sideways, "Well? . . ." she inquired.

"Go to bed"; the old lady lent her cheek.

"She's—a—" Mrs. George lowered her voice as she glanced up at the figures disappearing round the angle of the stair—"she's a little quiet, don't you think?"

"Yes—thank God!" Alice agreed with fervour.

"At all events," her mother admitted, "she isn't one of your 'bright' Americans."

"Oh! if she'd been 'bright,' we'd never have brought her, would we, Michael?"

Michael laughed. "Coming to talk to me while I smoke?" he asked his sister.

"Not yet. I've got to go up and get her first impressions, 'hot and hot.' Fun to hear what she really thinks of us!"

"If you do, I'll give you sixpence," Michael called from half-way down the corridor. As the smoking-room door shut, mother and daughter exchanged looks.

. . . . . .

After sitting with Camilla for a quarter of an hour in front of the bedroom fire, Alice felt the chance of winning that sixpence very slight. Direct attack on Camilla's reserve having failed, Alice tried a flank movement.

"You mustn't be afraid of my mother."

"Afraid?" Camilla opened her eyes very wide indeed.

"Oh, a good many people are, you know."

"Yes," came reflectively, "I suppose so."

"And why mightn't you be?"

Camilla considered that. "I should never be afraid of anybody," she brought out, "who was herself afraid."

"My *mother* afraid! And of what in the name of—"

"Oh, of more than one thing."

And nothing that Alice could say would get a word more out of her.

"You're a queer creature!"

"Am I?"

"But I rather love you all the same." Alice kissed her. "Now I must go down and have a cigarette with Michael."

"I thought you told me you weren't allowed—"

"I told you if I had a cigarette in my bedroom, I had to smoke up the chimney."

"Because she 'wouldn't have women smoking in her house.' And I noticed you didn't smoke after dinner." It was the only occasion on which Camilla had seen that indulgence omitted.

"Oh, even Michael mayn't smoke in the drawing-room *here,*" Alice said, smiling. "But Michael and I have a little fiction—that he enjoys his cigar the more if I go and talk to him while he smokes it."

"How can you be sure your mother mightn't take it into her head some night—"

"To go into the smoking-room? Why on earth *should* she?"

"If she suspected—"

"Oh! . . ." Alice's odd laughter perplexed the guest.

"Aren't you ever nervous for fear she might catch you?"

"The last thing she wants is to catch me."

"You don't mean she knows all the while?"

"Knows I smoke? Well, of course."

"But knows you smoke here?"

"With *her* nose?" Alice laughed again.

"Just lets you, so long as—"

"So long as I don't flaunt it. Does that shock you?"

"It—surprises me a little."

"You're about ten in some things, Camilla." Alice kissed her again before she ran down to Michael.

CHAPTER III

NOT for nothing had Mrs. Trenholme carefully inquired the hour of breakfast. She was down on the stroke.

A beautiful long room full of pale shining—the shining of old silver and the shining of a sun that was more silvery than golden. The guest stood at the window looking out. It occurred to her as odd that everybody in so large a party should be late.

Presently a voice: "Oh, you are down already!"

Mrs. Trenholme turned to face her hostess. They said "good morning." Conscious of a something indefinable in the air, the guest inquired: "Wasn't it the breakfast bell?"

Yes, it was the breakfast bell; and Mrs. Nancarrow apologized for her three minutes' tardiness. She mentioned the extent of her dereliction with a certain tartness. Mrs. Trenholme noticed later that those who weren't so punctual, and those who were downright and even fearfully late, were not reproached. Nor was the clock called to witness—not even silently—to their lateness, as it had been called to witness the stranger's promptitude.

While they were still alone: "What are you going to have?" Mrs. Nancarrow asked.

Mrs. Trenholme looked up and down with a hasty impression that there was more silver on the table than anything else. There seemed to be quite extraordinarily little to eat. Shining racks of severe, unbuttered toast, plates of biscuits—she knew she must call them scones, and the inevitable marmalade. Not a single comforting hot dish. Unless you called "a dish" the boiled eggs, each in its silver cup, all sitting in a kind of cruet stand.

The sight of the equipage in front of her hostess revived a sinking courage: "May I have coffee, please?"

She was given coffee.

She heard the weather defined. If her opinion had been asked, which it wasn't, she would have said it was hungry weather. A good night's sleep in this fine air had given her a regrettably good appetite. She helped herself sadly to a scone. While she buttered it, the hostess, who had risen for some reason, returned to her place.

The "reason" sat revealed on the plate she put down behind the urn. Sausage!

Now where on earth had this greedy old woman found the sausage? Camilla blinked with astonishment at the unexplained phenomenon. And why was there only one? Could it be one of those odd things prescribed by the doctor? "At 9:30 A. M.—for aged ladies with short tempers: One Sausage." The savour of it rose upon the air. Oh, for a sausage!

Camilla cast a hungry look in the direction of the door. It had not been opened since Mrs. Nancarrow's entrance. The solitary sausage had certainly not been brought in by a servant. And where were the servants? Had they all given notice, and gone off in a body? But after all, she reflected gloomily, what *was* there for a servant to hand? She understood now, she told herself, why the American breakfast was supposed to be excessive.

Oh, for an American breakfast!

The schoolgirl, Marjory St. Amant, came in with little Sue Nancarrow hanging on her arm; and soon after, Nelly and—Heaven be praised!—Michael.

During his greeting Camilla wondered how his cheerfulness would stand the sight of that lonely sausage on his mother's plate.

"But you aren't eating anything—that won't do. What will you have?" he repeated the tantalus question.

"I'm having—coffee," said Camilla in a tone of self-denial.

"Oh! but you must see what there is to eat." And then Michael began to walk about!

She noticed now, that instead of sitting down to their breakfast, these extraordinary people were *all* walking about! Hilda, who had come in just after Michael, and now Tony and Mr. Croft, Blanche, Diana—they had every one of them gone strolling about, talking and laughing, on the side of the room behind Camilla's back.

"Come and see what there is," Michael called out. And though it wasn't manners at all, in America, for you to leave the table once you had sat down, Michael evidently expected her, too, to go walking after her food. For there it was. A side table like a hotel buffet. An arrangement to keep covered dishes hot. Michael and the others lifted the covers, to reveal breakfast bacon, fish, devilled kidneys, and—oh, consolatory sight!—the rest of the sausages.

Camilla's spirits rose.

For all her interest in the covered dishes, she kept looking at Michael as he helped her. What good spirits he's in, her first thought. Her second, how good to look at! Not the first time, naturally, she had come to that conclusion. But as her eyes followed him: "It's the first time I've seen him dressed for riding," she excused herself. Never had his clean-limbed spareness, his physical fitness been so striking to her sense.

Not an ounce of superfluous flesh on the lightly moving body; and his face. . . . ! She remembered the retort some one made on hearing "beauty is but skin deep." Yes, but if "ugliness goes to the bone" with Michael, she thought, comeliness does. She had known all that for weeks. For some reason his "morning face" pleased her today so intensely, she could hardly keep her eyes away from that clear pink and tan; the tan-coloured hair and moustache, the grey-blue eyes, and those sound teeth of his crunching toast—yes, it wasn't romantic, but she

should always think he looked his best laughing and eating toast and marmalade.

Fortunately for Camilla's comfort, she had no idea of how critically her own "breakfast form" was being observed. When, with hunger appeased, she glanced up and down the long table at these fresh-cheeked people, and said to herself that it was really in the morning, not Michael only, but all these Nancarrows looked their best —she was unconsciously "very hot," as the children say in the game. She was coming close to the heart of one of the major dogmas of the house.

Mercifully hidden from the ken of strangers was the fact that many a guest who had come well out of the ordeal of dinner, met defeat at the breakfast table. Every one but Camilla was well aware of Mrs. Nancarrow's dictum: "I judge a woman from the appearance she makes at breakfast." No amount of evening brilliancy atoned, according to Mrs. Nancarrow, for a heavy eye, a careless, or a too elaborate toilet; or a complexion that showed muddy in the unsparing light of morning —for an appearance, in short, that did not give an impression of being well-rested, well-tubbed, well-brushed and freshly clothed.

In her mother's unsparing eye Alice saw reflected her own satisfaction in the unflawed creaminess of Camilla's skin, the freshness of the convent-made lawn tunic showing under the slashed black silk jacket and held high about the throat by a little brooch of pearls fashioned like a spray of lily-of-the-valley. No chains round her neck, no rings, no bracelets, no bang!

Michael was talking to Tony and Mr. Croft about tarpon fishing.

"Went fishing for tarpon and caught a Camilla," Alice said in a daring aside.

He hadn't caught Camilla on that occasion; but that didn't matter on a delicious morning like this, when after

all—after five long years—he *had* caught her. So his confederate look exulted.

"And what sort of a place is Florida, anyway?" Alice asked.

Again an exchange of glances—a sort of Freemason look: We won't tell *them*.

Camilla listened, amused by the description of the storm that interrupted pursuit of the tarpon and left Michael and his three companions stranded one wild night on the Florida coast. "Rain? You've got to go to Florida, haven't you?" he appealed to her, "to get rain."

Oh, *they* knew.

"Well, there was no inn—nothing. Yes, there was a little deserted school-house. Locked. Of course, we broke in. It was shelter. It wasn't anything more. Tired? Hardly able to stand. Jack and Evelyn—"

"Evelyn!" exclaimed Camilla. "You took a girl on a trip like that!"

"No, no! Evelyn was a man."

It must be some joke. So she smiled.

"Evelyn and Jack simply tumbled on the floor and went to sleep. I came off best," he laughed. "There were rats running about as big as. . . . But I slept on two forms."

"Whose forms did you sleep on?" Camilla asked with a horrified look.

"Why, the only ones there. Two together, and I lay down—"

"On *top* of them?"

"Why not?"

"They *let* you?"

"Let me what?" said Michael, bewildered.

"They didn't mind!—too tired, I suppose, to object."

Michael leaned across the table, laughing and saying, "One or other of us seems to be a little mad this morning."

"Not at all," she returned, with dignity. "I should never have thought it very nice of you to lie down on your poor tired friends."

"No, no! I said on two forms—"

"Well, weren't their poor bodies the only 'forms,' as you call them, there?"

The gale of laughter! through which Michael, when he found breath, said between gusts: "*School-room* forms. Seats. Without backs—"

"Oh-h!" with an abashed look. "How should I know you called a bench a form?"

As they stood together in the hall after breakfast: "Evelyn," she said, "tell me about Evelyn."

And when he had done so, she asked him if he was *sure* it wasn't a joke. Well, then, if it wasn't, all she could say was she was glad they hadn't given *him* a girl's name.

Michael was to ride over to his uncle's to meet the guns: "Alice says it would be too far for you. But we'll all be back to luncheon." And lower, for her ear only: "I expect my mother will show you the gardens."

But she didn't. Mrs. Nancarrow's morning was apparently a much-occupied time. She was heard giving orders, settling this one's business and that one's pleasure, up to the moment when, in the act of getting into the motor car, she adjured Alice to "be about in case those women should come early." As for herself, she would be fortunate if she were back in time for luncheon. Over the back of the open car the final injunction: They were not to wait.

Alice, too, seemed to have plenty to do. Mrs. George was with the children. The young people scattered to lessons of various sorts. The grown-up Diana, and even Blanche, who was understood to be "out," one and all had lessons of some kind.

Camilla turned over the papers in the hall, and then went and wrote letters.

The morning seemed long. At intervals she said to

herself: "I wish I'd known they call a bench a form. I must pay great attention." How they had laughed!

At luncheon, Mrs. Nancarrow in her place, and Michael back with three new men. Two were quite young, and turned out to be cousins of the Nancarrows'. The older man, a red-faced Colonel in the Guards, was married, and the two smart ladies—smart as a well-groomed horse is smart—were respectively the Colonel's wife and daughter. Mrs. Williamson-Ames, like Mrs. George Nancarrow, though in a totally different way, looked too young to be the mother of the tall girl, Miss Ethel, just Blanche's age and her great friend. Camilla decided that the reason you thought of thoroughbred horses when you saw the Williamson-Ames ladies, wasn't only because the material of their admirably tailored clothes reminded one of horse-blanketing, and not even because they had so much leather about them—brown leather belts, leather buttons, skirts leather-bound, a brown leather band round each smart felt hat—their very gloves and boots somehow more "leathery" than anybody else's; partly, perhaps, on account of the extensive area they covered. No, it was chiefly their long, handsome faces and flat cheeks which kept reminding you of horses. Camilla supposed Alice, too, must have been struck with this resemblance, for, as they went in to luncheon, she whispered: "Thoroughbred look about her, don't you think?" And then she added: "Granddaughter of Lord Hathersage."

Luncheon was rather a trial.

Michael tried to save her, but her lack of presence of mind had set her firmly down a long way from him, between the governess and Blanche. Camilla scarcely spoke, but where everybody else was talking and laughing, she hoped her silence would be unnoticed.

"You are coming out, too?" Michael called down the table to her when the coffee came in.

Camilla was the only woman there not wearing a hat,

except the governess. "Yes, yes," he went on, "you must come."

. . . . . .

A more perfect afternoon was never seen. At Michael's side, through the park and following the Braybrook down to a little lake. You came on it without warning, as you made your way through its encircling coppice—there suddenly it was, shining below you, rush-fringed, unruffled, and rather secret, guarding a look of loneliness. With its thickets and its tangles beyond the tall rushes, it quite achieved its little effect of Wild Nature. You could forget the perfectly kept paths that brought you here, the ordered stateliness of the park you had left behind, where was never a dead branch, no mark of decay or accident, neither windfall nor lightning stroke. Camilla thought of Florida and smiled at this chastened and toy-box wildness—loved it, too, for its peace and its—what to herself she called its "*safe* beauty."

She forgot the rest of the party—forgot even "those Williamson-Ames's," as, with instinctive antagonism, she had found herself thinking of them—and gave herself up to that inner happiness whose name was Michael.

He stopped once to call out some instruction (Camilla did not even trouble to ask him to explain its meaning) to a rough-looking individual in breeches, who, with several others, crossed the path in front of them. "That was Hatch," Michael said, and as if Hatch had reminded him of his duties, he paused and glanced back at the party.

Mrs. Williamson-Ames, with Tony and one of the Nancarrow cousins, were catching up the host. Behind came Mrs. George and Hilda Wilton, with Colonel Williamson-Ames and another of the cousins.

"Hang these people!" Michael breathed devoutly. "Well, it won't be for long."

Now he stood consulting with Colonel Williamson-Ames and the cousins.

Mrs. Williamson-Ames joined them. They seemed to be waiting for something.

Everybody waited. Far in the rear, two figures still lagged, not diminishing by an inch the distance between themselves and the rest of the party—Lady St. Amant and the tutor.

Out of the thicket, a few yards away, stepped Diana, adorably pretty in a deerstalker cap. With her were Alec and Blanche and Miss Ethel. And *they* waited.

Camilla's eyes, going from lake to wood and from group to group, came always back to Mrs. Williamson-Ames. The lady's healthy, high-coloured complexion bore well the full light of day. Her carefully done hair shone. Undeniably she and her daughter belonged to the order of women who surprise you by looking much handsomer out of doors than in. The same might have been said for the "Heather-mixture Harris tweeds" they wore. No need to examine the inside of the collar to read "Bond Street" as their place of fashioning. Nothing could better have set off the figures of the Williamson-Ames ladies than those habit-like jackets, leather-buttoned, leather-belted, leather-bound. The close-setting pockets could never have been asked to relax so much as to hold a handkerchief. Where, then, did the Williamson-Ames's put their—

Oh, up their sleeves—like Michael.

And now a fifth man was in the group. Middle-aged and "of full habit," as the saying is; with a rich formal voice and a pontifical air. Like the rest, he carried a gun, and with no suggestion of the unpractised hand. Rather with an easy majesty, as condescending to a bauble.

Michael introduced Mr. Charles Heathcote. A very pleasant gentleman, Cousin Charles. While he stood graciously discoursing to Camilla, various rearrangements took place.

Michael went on a little way with the Colonel, and then

stopped. Mrs. Williamson-Ames had already insinuated herself between Mrs. Trenholme and Cousin Charles, whom she greeted with great cordiality. Indeed, she had so much to say to her old friend, that the superfluous stranger turned away, to find Miss Ethel standing near with an unmistakably bored expression on her face. Mrs. Trenholme was feeling a trifle bored herself.

"Do you know why we are staying here so long?" she inquired.

Miss Ethel looked at her interlocutor curiously. "Waiting for the duck to come over, I *suppose*," she said with the intonation of the well-assured.

Camilla longed to ask why the duck *should* come over if the guns stayed here. But no. She wouldn't put any more questions to this terribly correct young woman. Like her mother, Miss Ethel's erect smartness was emphasized by the high white stock she wore round her long neck. Both ladies carried walking-sticks. Miss Ethel's quite slim; her mother's thick to the verge of clumsiness. Bamboo it was, furnished with an iron spike instead of a ferule and with an odd, clumsy handle.

Without suggesting that they should move on, Mrs. Williamson-Ames had deftly engineered Cousin Charles in the direction of Mr. Nancarrow. A glance at Miss Ethel in passing, associated the young lady with this flank movement. But she paused on the way for the laudable enterprise of annexing a Nancarrow cousin. She stood talking to him while her mother, unhasting, unresting, went unerringly on. Camilla, openly abandoned, sat down on a stump and watched with undisguised interest the slight deviation in Mrs. Williamson-Ames's course which brought her up a little behind Michael instead of by his side. Still assiduously attended by Cousin Charles, the lady took possession of the strategical position she had so carefully chosen. As Balboa planted the Spanish Standard in the new soil of

the Pacific shore for a sign of His Catholic Majesty's possession, so did the lady plant the iron-shod point of her bamboo in the soil of Nancarrow Wood. She opened out the handles.

A seat.

Her place of enthronement did not possess all the advantages she had meant, since Michael, without turning round, came back to the very spot Mrs. Williamson-Ames had just left, and stood talking to Mrs. Trenholme.

Miss Ethel showed herself not unequal to the emergency. She was speedily on hand with the Nancarrow cousin in her train. Standing there by the extinguished Camilla, she conversed with the two men about the great drive of the day before at Mr. James Nancarrow's—saying the right things in just the right way as Camilla was forced secretly to admit. Michael alone seemed not to be paying much attention to her easy, expert talk. He kept on looking down.

At last: "Shall I tie that? It might trip you." Camilla followed his eye to her shoe. They all looked at Camilla's shoe—except Michael, who had now gone to lean his gun against a tree.

Galvanized into sudden energy, "Thank you," Camilla had said hastily, "I can do it." In the act of bending down, she caught the smile on Miss Williamson-Ames's face. Bad enough to have the miserable shoe coming undone. Oh, it was well Michael hadn't been allowed—

As she tied the knot with nervous dispatch, she couldn't avoid bestowing further unfavourable attention upon those same shoes. Fear of delaying the party had prevented her from stopping to change. Thin soles and French heels looked more intensely unsuitable than ever they had in their lives—by comparison with the stoutly handsome specimens on the neighbouring feet of Miss Ethel.

Mrs. Trenholme need not have hurried so desperately to tie that knot before Mr. Nancarrow could get back. He had no sooner put down his gun, than he caught it up again. Through the still sunshine a rushing sound. Oh, she knew that sound of wings!—and smiled skyward as a flight of birds went patterning the blue.

Guns from every direction. And again Bang! Bang! and cries, and wheeling up there in the still air.

Down through the sunshine a great bird crashed into the bushes a few yards from where Camilla had risen in excitement.

Other birds had dropped elsewhere. The one that had fallen nearest was picked up by Tony. He held it out for Camilla to see. Instead of complimenting the boy on his shot, "Heavens!" she said, "how fat it is!"

"A . . . Yes," said Tony, somewhat surprised at the form her approval took. "Hatch feeds 'em all right."

Michael was calling out something now, and there was a general move forward. Presently a second glimpse, far on, of the red-faced man in breeches, and the lifted tails and muzzles of the dogs dashing in and out of cover.

Beaters, that was what Hatch and his men were! Camilla watched them skulking round the lake.

As for the gentlemen, gun under arm, singly or in twos, with their attendant ladies, on they went, walking and talking, till again silence, attention! the beaters would put up the birds and the shot would bring them down—sometimes in the water, sometimes almost at your feet. Then perhaps you turned away your eyes while the retrievers attended to the rest. They were so fat, those Hatch-fed duck.

. . . . . .

"Do you care for this kind of thing?" Mrs. Williamson-Ames asked, looking at Camilla with curious eyes.

"I—don't know that I do very much," she said unemotionally.

Michael kept coming back for little odds and ends of talk. Camilla found herself not listening very attentively, being preoccupied about a private matter—a matter too private for sharing.

All the same, she noticed Mrs. Williamson-Ames's eyes following Michael with that look of smiling intelligence, the look in which there is so much more of intelligence than mirth. After he had gone on again, in a peaty, swampy place, Camilla, forced to lift her too-long dress, was shamed by Mrs. Williamson-Ames's glance at a froth of white-frilled petticoat. That the Williamson-Ames's wore the sensible knickerbocker could hardly have been more certain had they stepped out of their ankle-length, leather-bound skirts, to demonstrate the fact.

Oh, how right they were! How well they did everything!

"Have you often been out?" she asked Camilla.

"Out?"

"Yes, with the guns. You haven't, perhaps, seen very much shooting?"

"Not this sort."

"I thought not," she said with a little smile. And then, since Mrs. Trenholme took that "lying down," as Mrs. Williamson-Ames would have said, "What sort *have* you seen?" she asked.

"Oh! the sort that takes some shooting."

The lady opened her hazel eyes.

"The sort," Mrs. Trenholme went on, "where the odds are fairer and the birds have a chance."

"A chance!" Mrs. Williamson-Ames repeated.

"Where they haven't been bred tame," she explained. "Wild duck shooting, in the Florida marshes."

The other woman smiled. "Yes, that *would* be different." Her eyes went down to that luckless shoe of Camilla's.

She had been miserably aware for full five minutes that the disgusting thing had come undone again. Once

she had lingered behind a big tree, hoping to repair the mischief so quickly and deftly that no one would have time to—

"Undone again?" Mrs. Williamson-Ames smiled. "Oh, I dare say Mr. Nancarrow—"

Camilla swooped down. "I've *done* it!" she said before she had more than caught at the floating ends. She made good her boast and came briskly on. But her confident air masked a most uneasy mind.

If he would understand what follows, let no man think to appraise the emotion which a woman, otherwise fairly sensible, will expend upon some faulty detail in her dress. The doubter may ask any woman whether, with her hand on her heart, she can say that some of the most care-filled moments in her life have not been those in which a stocking (or some garment yet more unused to the public eye) has broken from its moorings and slipped and slipped, carrying along with it peace of mind, self-respect, Faith, Hope and Charity. Perhaps these moods of disproportionate misery are far-travelled; stamped, maybe, on the waxen tablet of the brain as the earliest impression of feminine responsibility. There is remarkable accord in the views of nurses and others whose care is about us in our infancy, that the chief duty of the girl-child, or of woman, is to keep herself "neat." This tyranny of tidiness, unpopular as well as hopeless in its application to the other sex, is abandoned along with the man-child's long skirts. A *boy* whose stockings are always well-gartered, his shoes tied, his hands clean?—perish the unmanly thought! But the girl! if she isn't tidy, what in the name of civilization, is she? Not for nothing is there no masculine equivalent for slut. Many degrees this side of such perdition, the seed of future anguish is early sown.

There was, however, more in this matter, precisely for Camilla. The growing sense on her part of "unsuitableness" had been bad enough. But that was reme-

diable. Never again would she come out with the guns in thin shoes. What wasn't remediable—oh, she had been told it at intervals all her life, living, as her lot had fallen, among competent, resourceful people—that inadequacy of hers which was inborn. And here was this old snare entangling her again under the new skies. *Camilla couldn't tie knots that "stayed tied."*

She tried to excuse herself. Her knots had nearly always been tied for her. But equally, knots had been, in the natural order, tied for her sisters, too. But Julia and Lucy had not only shone here, as everywhere else, they hadn't scrupled to tell Camilla as a little girl, that in idiot asylums the doctors thought the idiots quite "coming on," however much they mopped and mowed and spilt their food—there was hope for them, if they could learn to tie knots.

All very well to accuse people of childishness who take these trifles to heart. Our lifelong weal or woe too often hangs on a trifle.

A sinking sense of the insecurity of human happiness came over Camilla, as she remembered Leroy on the subject of knots.

Even in the early days, Leroy had been dreadfully worried if her shoes came untied. Later he had been driven to bitter speeches on the subject.

"The kind of girl whose shoes are for ever—"

Then the moment when Leroy had "shown her how." Nothing more to be dreaded than to be shown how. Your last ray of excuse reft from you. For this affair was a kind of trick, which in your hands came right only by the grace of God. Oh, sooner than it had happened their domestic bliss would have been shattered, had not some true humanist invented a clasp with tiny teeth that held the knot as a ferret holds a rat.

Camilla's competent English maid had done away with those peace-preservers. The maid was as clever as a man. Something very strange must have happened

to her faithful bow-knot that it should behave like this.

When Michael appeared, Camilla dropped her skirt. Let it jag, let it take on mud to the knee, *she* wasn't going to hold up her skirt. Nothing should make her forget that particular something in the male constitution, which made for ever incompatible serenity of mind and the sight of an untied shoe.

A fallen log to surmount, a brook to cross on stepping-stones!—and who should say that even a skirt which barely cleared the ground could be depended on to cover your shortcomings? She watched Michael out of the corner of her eye, saying to herself that *once* (by the more good-tempered or the more in love) the horrid spectacle may be endured. How soon should she see those first signs of strained self-control passing by well-known stages into a cold fury at the second and the third exhibition of imbecility in this matter of knots? She couldn't bear it!

She must speak to Alice, she said. She took cover in a thicket and knelt down to grapple with Fate.

An indignant tug, and lo! the accursed thing came off in her hand.

Alice appeared at that moment of despair, but it didn't matter that Alice should see. Besides, Alice didn't turn a hair. One of the cardinal differences between the sexes.

The birds came over again. Again the popping of the guns, again the spiral falling and the plump of a full body striking the ground.

And now Michael was coming back. Straight up to her he came, and leaned against the tree, facing her, "You've been looking rather desolate and about six!"

He'd seen! This reference to extreme juvenility—oh, she had been through all that. She dropped her eyes.

"Do you know," he went on, "you are quite the youngest person I've ever known—when you aren't one

of the oldest and wisest? Now, what's the matter?"

"The m-matter! What should be the matter?"

"Can't think. You've got to tell me."

Catch her! She smiled, immensely relieved. "I've got on too long a skirt," she said.

"Hold it up."

"*No!* It—a—tires me to hold it up. I shall wear a short one next time."

"Why should you?" said Michael, a shade of anxiety crossing his face. "Your long skirt is very nice."

"Oh, you mustn't tell lies. I've got more or less proper clothes, only I hadn't time—"

"You mean like those." He nodded towards the admirably turned-out Williamson-Ames's. "I forbid you to wear things like that," he said.

"Well, proper shoes I *must* have," she said firmly.

"I should hate you to wear any different shoes."

"You haven't—" (Heaven be praised!)—"You haven't noticed them!" And under her long skirt, for completer assurance, she set the foot with the untied shoe safely behind a tree-stump.

"Oh, didn't I? I noticed 'em quite particularly. Never saw shoes I liked better."

"Unsuitable!" pronounced Camilla.

"I like unsuitableness," Michael said, showing his teeth in a wide smile.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Williamson-Ames, looking on from a distance, had not waited till now to discover the lie of the land.

"I think I've heard of your friend," she said to Alice. "Very rich, isn't she?"

"Well," said Alice, "she seems to be able to scrape along."

"Scrapes along in Queen Anne's Gate, doesn't she?" the other woman laughed. "Yes, I seem to have heard of her—I can't quite remember in what connection." Mrs. Williamson-Ames was wise in her day. If the

woman was going to marry Michael Nancarrow, it was well to hold hard.

All the same, this was no occasion for prolonged reflection. One had, especially a mother had, in these matters, to strike before the iron cooled in the mould. Enough eligible young Englishmen had married Americans.

The lady sat on her spiked bamboo seat revolving a plan.

. . . . . .

The final drive took them across a turnip field.

"I expect you know Mrs. Jardine—Mrs. Dick Jardine?"

Mrs. Williamson-Ames's tone said: "*There's* a woman who wouldn't let her shoe-strings get the upper foot, so to speak."

"You *don't* know Lily Jardine? She's a compatriot of yours."

"Oh, *they're* everywhere," said Alice.

"Yes, but Lily Jardine is a Southerner."

"The South is tolerably extensive," Michael suggested.

"Lily Jardine is tolerably extensive, too. Oh, not in person. *Petite.* Huge violet eyes. Knows everybody. You *must* have met Lily Jardine. She made a sensation when she first came over."

Alice remembered the sensation. But she hadn't met the charmer.

Camilla said she thought she'd seen some account of the marriage in an American paper. She forebore to add there was little likelihood of her having other sources of information about the daughter of a foreign confectioner in an adjoining State.

"They would never allow them to come to Popham," Mrs. Williamson-Ames went on, "till this year. She had a boy three or four months ago. So they were asked. For a week. But Lily is such a success with her old father-in-law, that they've made her throw up two other

visits and stay on. She says any day we may see her death in the *Times*. Excruciating boredom."

"Poor wretch! Why not ask her over here to dine some time?" said Alice, precisely as Mrs. Williamson-Ames had intended.

"Well, she's great fun. I'm sure *you'd* like her," Mrs. Williamson-Ames assured the American who was not great fun—at least not intentionally.

Without preamble: "I'll find you some laces," Alice said to Camilla.

"Laces?" Was she thinking of sharing some priceless heirloom? She mustn't. "It's very kind of you. I think I have all I need."

"Why don't you use them, then?"

Camilla stared. "Out in the woods?" This was "unsuitableness" run mad.

"I should say specially out in the woods," laughed Alice.

"Even I wouldn't do that," answered Camilla gravely.

"What *are* you talking about? *Laces*, I said, for your shoes."

Camilla stared. She remembered an ancient photograph of Aunt Amy, as a girl, with a tassel hanging out of each boot-top. . . . She had a sudden vision of herself, in obedience to Alice's strange taste, with lace ruffles falling out of her boots.

"I don't think," she said slowly, "that it would suit me."

Before Alice had lifted her bewildered eyes, Camilla had found them on the gaping shoe. "Oh, you mean shoe-strings! Yes, I remember now, you call them laces over here."

"What did you say? Strings?" Both the ladies were smiling. "But they *aren't* strings."

"Well, they aren't *lace*."

"Yes, they are. You lace a thing with a lace, don't you?"

No, they were strings. Or they used to be. Leather thongs.

"They're exactly the same, except in colour, as your stay-laces. What do you call *them*?—stay-strings?"

They laughed again. Alice repeated: "Stay-strings! You *are* a funny nation!"

Camilla was doing her best to make them understand that in America you said corset-laces. But they were laughing quite absurdly. "And what do you use for your boots?" Mrs. Williamson-Ames inquired. "Boot-strings?"

"We never say boot-strings. Shoe-strings," repeated Camilla firmly.

"Then you don't have boots in America?"

Yes they *had* boots.

"I see. In America you do up your boots with shoe-strings!"

. . . . . .

Mrs. Nancarrow herself hardly realized how little, even now, they knew about Alice's new friend, till, in the interval before the bridge-tables were brought out that evening, Mrs. Williamson-Ames began to ask questions.

The Williamson-Ames's had been making a round of visits. Before going to Mr. James Nancarrow's they had been at Popham. Dick Jardine, the nephew and heir to the earldom, was staying there at the same time—"nice boy—and along with him his American wife."

Little Mrs. Jardine knew everybody on both sides of the Atlantic.

Mrs. Nancarrow pricked up her ears.

When Alice again suggested—but this time tentatively—"having them over," "Why not?" said her mother. "You might telephone to Popham in the morning."

CHAPTER IV

SUNDAY with Michael! she kept thinking.

"Any one," began Mrs. Nancarrow at breakfast, "who is coming to church"—and she looked round with some severity at the ladies, as she told the company precisely the length of time required for the walk, and at what hour she herself would be setting forth. Either she did glance with special significance in Camilla's direction, or her Michael-hungering soul imagined so. "Thank you," she murmured, and glanced down the table.

Michael was talking to everybody at his end, but Camilla knew that nothing she did, or looked, or said, escaped him. He smiled at her in a tantalizing way, as much as to say: "Now, we'll see what you do."

"For my part," Alice had quickly announced, that her views might for no brief moment be in doubt, "for my part, I shall observe it as a day of complete rest. With a novel and my feet up." Under her mother's cold eye, she recommended the plan to Camilla, and she clinched her argument with: "Michael isn't going."

Michael went on talking to the Colonel.

"I expect Michael would like to take you for a walk," Alice insisted, partly for the enlightenment of Miss Ethel and her mamma.

"Couldn't we walk later?" Camilla inquired.

Oh, the arch-diplomat! Alice's laughing eyes accused.

But Michael agreed presently that this first Sunday, any way, Camilla should be "allowed," as he put it, to go to church. He would come and meet her.

And so it was that she took her place for the first time in the family pew—or rather series of pews—along with the two Mrs. Nancarrows, the children, grandchil-

dren and the governess. Mrs. Williamson-Ames and Miss Ethel were there, too, but on this occasion they didn't seem to count, except in the sum total of their own correctitude.

At any other time the beauty of the little church would have enthralled Camilla. With the aid of her simple handbook knowledge, she would have traced its "periods" and probable history. But beauty of another sort held her captive today, a beauty even nearer human lives than this Norman and sixteenth-century expression. And not beauty, only, claimed her. The doors of her senses all swung wide. Nothing asked admittance that this new richness in her starved soul did not find a welcome for—whether the intoned invocation; the faint old scents—musty, bookwormy, cellary; barenesses; dilapidations; even deliberate alterations, with a possible exception of the Nancarrow pew. She awoke with a start to its Lady Chapel origin. Already her unchastened New-World imagination had recognized in the Nancarrow pew an uncomfortable resemblance to the Royal box in a "foreign" theatre. For the pew was boldly set apart from the rest of the congregation, up by the chancel; spacious as a royal box, and, like a royal box, lower than the gallery and higher by a couple of steps than the ground floor of the edifice. But she forgot all that in listening to Cousin Charles; in looking at the monumental brasses. Beyond a doubt she read more inscriptions than prayers.

The place was peopled by Nancarrows, the living a negligible handful beside these others. Michael's father was here, and a little brother. The Hoppner lady, too, after bringing the finest of the jewels and two stout sons into the family, had taken off her mob-cap for the last time, and lain her down just outside the pew. General Everard Nancarrow, who had brought back the great porcelain bowl from the middle of China to the middle of the Nancarrow drawing-room, was opposite, in bas

relief and sounding epitaph. In soberer fashion, only their battles named, one Naval Commander after another. Camilla had never before thought with such intimacy of the great part a little church may have in family history. Of so much that was now very near her heart, this had been the scene. This was where all these people had been baptized—(Michael in his infant's robes!). One Nancarrow maiden after another had been married here. And, after roving the round world over in the English way, here all these sailors had come at last to be buried.

. . . . . .

"Nice of you to go to church with my mother," Michael said quite low, as they walked home by way of Nancarrow wood. Hilda had come with him to meet the church-goers, but she had joined Mrs. George.

"Nice of me!" Camilla's voice in its usual distinctness reached his mother, walking just in front with Mrs. Williamson-Ames. Mrs. Nancarrow glanced back as Camilla added: "It's the pleasantest thing I've done here, except seeing the pictures with you."

Michael's eyes rewarded her.

Whether the unguarded adoration in his face was too much for his mother: "Our two or three pictures," she said a little sharply, "are nothing beside what Mrs. Trenholme must have seen in other places."

Camilla felt herself reproved. Reproof, if she deserved it, she could acknowledge. If she didn't deserve it, she was long used to find refuge in silence.

But Mrs. Nancarrow seemed to desire not merely to close the door on cliché compliments, but to close it with emphasis, and even to pinch Camilla's fingers a little in the act.

"Alice tells me," she threw over her shoulder, "that you know a good deal about pictures."

"And so she does!" Michael triumphed.

"Alice means I—have my likes, and—the other thing."

"No." Mrs. Nancarrow was not to be corrected without good and sufficient cause. "Alice says that abroad you spent a great deal of your time in seeing the great collections."

"Talk about collections!" Michael stopped in the avenue which he had newly-opened in the wood. "Look at that!"

Camilla's eyes found at the end of the vista a little knoll of shaded greens.

Did she see that acre or so, enclosed in wire netting? Well, that was full of nursling trees. He'd been going in for afforestation these last few years. Immensely interesting finding out what trees liked. "They're as particular about their food and climate as any human." On the margin of the wood he pointed out a bare hillside—"all wooded once." He should follow the old lines. . . . "We've got to replace the ancient forests."

"It will take a long time," said the voice from the new world.

"Yes, but *think* what they'll be like some day!"

"You won't see it." At which, with quickened pace, Mrs. Nancarrow walked on.

"Well, no, hardly," he laughed. "But others will."

Camilla knew, as well as the rest of the party, he meant other Nancarrows.

Hilda, with a friendly air—she was evidently determined to be quite "nice" to the interloper—advised Mrs. Trenholme not to encourage Mr. Nancarrow's hobby. Soon he wouldn't be able to take an interest in anything outside his blessed trees!

But it was a false move on Hilda's part. It gave him the very opening he wanted. His "one sympathizer" must come to look at the nursery.

Mrs. Nancarrow stalked on with never a glance to right or left, as her son and the visitor branched off towards the knoll.

When they reached the enclosure what they did was to turn and look across at Nancarrow.

"How long have your people been here?" she asked.

"Oh, before the days of Bruce, they *say*," he laughed; but a note had come into his voice that made her glance shyly at him. No reflection on his face of that something in the voice that made her feel "this is what he has loved most." Small wonder! She exonerated him from the depth of a stirred heart. But what she said in her detached way, was: "You *do* care for it all!"

He glanced down quickly. "You wonder at that?"

"No," she answered. Yet none the less, and all unreasonably, she was jealous. She imagined he had kept that note for her. Well, she couldn't share it with any other human, but, as she followed his gaze, she felt she could share it with Nancarrow.

The world has talked glibly and long about the "falling in love at first sight" of man and woman. But there is such a thing as love at first sight of a wood, a skyline, or a human habitation.

A world of woods, always a horizon, and everywhere the homes of men. Yet one of these will have power over all the rest to stir the deeps in us.

Camilla knew now it was to that sort of passion she had fallen victim, on her first sight of Nancarrow.

"It must be easy," she confessed, "to care for—that!"

In the same quick, low voice, "Will you try, then?" he said.

She showed her emotion only by embarrassment, and the little silence. "What I was thinking is, you must be used to people's—I mean, it would be easy to care for—all this—even if one isn't a Nancarrow."

He came so close that his elbow slipped into the hollow of her arm. "Why not be a Nancarrow and see?"

What most immediately she "saw" in that hurried

upward glance, was that the pink and tan face was quite extraordinarily gentle. But when she had looked into his eyes, she found the look there which, in other faces, she had learned to fly from. Was he like the rest?

"We haven't known each other very long," she said.

"God bless me—we've known each other for six years!"

"Oh, you mean Florida! *That* wasn't knowing."

"Well, what about the Lugano days? And all the days since?" He studied her averted face. "We're both rather shy people, I admit. But we know each other as some don't who've lived years together."

"Yet you told me I wasn't easy to know," she reminded him gravely.

"Did I? I only meant about some little external thing that other women would have chattered to threads."

"It isn't any little external thing, I mean. It is something—something that reaches to the roots. Of a woman's life, anyway."

"You mean your being married before?"

She nodded. And then, as always, she sheered away from that—exactly as though she hadn't, in this instance, introduced the theme herself. She hailed those glimpses among the larches in the lower copse, the shifting mauve and silver-grey of Sunday attire which emphasized two figures that still lingered. Michael had successfully shed the rest of the party. Not his mother and not Hilda Wilton. They were unmistakably waiting.

The four went up to the house together. That must have been what happened, though Camilla, walking in enchanted silence at Michael's side, was not very clearly aware of the irrelevant forms that people the rest of the world.

Other beings, even Mrs. Nancarrow, moved before

Camilla's eyes like phantoms in a mist. Her increasing physical as well as mental preoccupation with Michael, had reached a pitch at which consciousness, intermittently and with difficulty, registered any impression outside him, except this inanimate beauty all about them, which seemed a part of him. She had bathed in it the whole morning long. Indoors as well the tide was full. It surged about her as never before, on entering the hall. Broad shafts of sunshine streamed through mullioned windows, showing the perfection of the oak, caressing the portraits, revealing a score of beauties that had before been shrouded.

As her eyes met Michael's she smiled and nodded. Now, this is the kind of wordless conversation which seldom fails to annoy those not engaged in it. Even the vague Camilla caught by chance a "something" in Mrs. Nancarrow's face, that made her feel some explanation should be forthcoming. "It *is* beautiful!" she said. "More beautiful than—" She slipped back into the sea of inarticulate sensation.

"More beautiful than what?" demanded a cold voice.

". . . than most things," said the visitor in her inadequate way.

"I was afraid," Michael beamed, "you might be disappointed."

"Oh, no, you weren't!"

He stared and then broke into happy laughter.

"He was wondering—" Camilla made her little effort to include the phantom "others"—"wondering whether I could appreciate it."

Michael was better satisfied with her rejoinder than his mother. Hilda, perched on an oak chest, drew off her gloves with a critical air, as Camilla, drifting past the tall cabinets full of Nankin blue, said something about the justice the sun was doing these old porcelains!

"It hasn't," remarked Mrs. Nancarrow, her air of indulgence quite failing to disguise the acridity of her tone, "it hasn't taken you long to find out Michael's pet weakness."

"Oh, I thought it was trees," said her son, still smiling. But Camilla was jarred. She came to a standstill under the Sir Joshua that was so like Michael.

"He is rather foolish about the Nancarrow things," said his mother. Through her son's laughing self-defence she went on: "Mrs. Trenholme mustn't feel obliged—we don't call on other people to 'appreciate' at his rate."

"*You* don't 'call'! No, no—Nancarrow calls." And, lifting her eyes, Camilla was both astonished and disturbed to meet a look of wary cynicism in the old lady's face.

"We are told you have been a great deal about the world," said Mrs. Nancarrow drily.

Camilla stood wrestling with a miserable sense of being convicted of insincere enthusiasms. Michael's mother thought the visitor was flattering her son's amiable weakness!

She met the old lady's unsparing eyes in the mirror where her grey-clad figure was reflected untying a veil. Michael's mother took this American for a phrase-maker!—a thing so unbearable as to quicken the slowest intelligence. She asked herself sternly why she had said that about General Nancarrow's porcelains? Why *had* she this particular feeling about the Nancarrow portraits? Was it, indeed, all love of Michael?

He was saying with a chastened air: "We *are* rather attached to our own things, I suppose—" But to anybody who had seen what Mrs. Trenholme had . . . Nancarrow, Michael admitted, wasn't in it!

Oh! but very particularly was Nancarrow in it! And just because she had, as the mockers say, "collected" Palaces and Castles, she was conscious of something here,

apart from Michael, . . . yet something beyond words precious.

"I think I could tell you, Mr. Nancarrow," she said in that fashion which Americans share with Russians—a little formal and not without its charm—of repeating the name of the interlocutor, "I think I could tell you, Mr. Nancarrow, why beautiful things here appeal to me more. For I admit there must be some reason." She met Hilda's amused smile with a stringing up of nerves. "It must be because these," her eyes slipped over from panel to panel to rest her final appeal upon eighteenth-century Michael, "these aren't just fine pictures. They are belongings, in a sense that bought things can't be. There's the Nancarrow stamp on all your beautiful things. They are pieces of private history as well as—" She stopped to take breath and courage.

"It is quite true," she glanced at the group made by Mrs. Nancarrow and Hilda, "I have gone about looking at 'collections.' And that's how, I suppose, I feel the difference here. In the country seats abroad, as well as in the Palaces—oh, lovely, lovely things!" The dark eyes shone with the reflected splendour of foreign treasure houses.

"And in America, too, we are making our collections. But these—" She stopped again, trying to formulate her sudden realization that the centuries-long accumulations in the country-houses of this rich, secure old England weren't collectors' hoards. There was no Museum taint about these things. All vitalized and personally significant. They were the sign not only of an enlightened, beauty-loving people, but of a people unwasted; if not unconquerable, free till now from the foot of the conqueror and from his grasping, devastating hand. In other lands such treasures had been scattered abroad. Many times they'd passed from one person to another, one country to another. But never had it happened that all were assembled again, under the roof where first they

met—never again were they owned by the people for whom they meant the most.

Oh, she saw it plainly enough—but could she say it?

"The reason you have your family things instead of other people's family things—" she brought out slowly, picking her way amongst old memories and new impressions—"it isn't only because you stay here always in the same place. If the houses in England are, as you say, full of," she nodded at the portraits and the porcelains, "such things, isn't it because England hasn't been conquered for—how long is it, Mr. Nancarrow, since you were invaded?"

"Upon my soul, I believe she's right!" Michael struck his hands together with delight—whether at Camilla's score or Britain's. "The Dutch once got as far as the Thames, but I don't believe we've been invaded for—going on a thousand years."

"Very well!" she smiled at Michael's mother. "Maybe *that's* why your 'few little things' mean more than museums full—even to a traveller."

. . . . . .

"Come and see the tower," Michael said to her half an hour after luncheon. That was for others' ears. For hers: "We've got things to settle, haven't we? The most important things in the universe."

She smiled. Oh, it was coming very near!

As ill-luck would have it, the Williamson-Ames's wanted to see the tower, too. In the end, half the household came along. It seemed to be like that here. They were always doing the same thing, and doing it "together."

The tower wasn't quite so entrancing as Camilla had meant it to be, though they groped their way up spiral stairs of steep-pitched stone, and crept about in cells and secret places, and at last came out upon the battlements and made acquaintance with the men of stone. A good part of the afternoon slipped away in the tower.

Afterwards they did the gardens—still with that too faithful train—Hilda Wilton, Diana, Tony, Alec and the Williamson-Ames's.

Michael stopped, at last, half-way down the thyme walk. "Come back," he whispered to Camilla, and basely they left the others making their way in all innocence to the dial.

But luck was not with the deserters.

Half-way to the house, Marjorie St. Amant appeared, coming towards them with the face of the news-bearer.

"This is no walk at all!" Michael grumbled. "After tea I shall take you down to the lake. But we won't say where we are going—"

Marjorie, a little breathless, was asking where Di was. "Who do you think has come? Father."

"Has he? How did he manage it?" said Michael imperturbably.

"Partly the horrible Sunday train. Partly motor. He wouldn't say he was coming because he wasn't sure, and didn't want to disappoint Peggy. Yes, that little monkey wrote to him off her own bat. It's disgraceful, the way father spoils Peggy—"

"Does your mother know?"

Oh, yes! She was with father. And off sped Marjorie to bid her sister to complete the St. Amant family circle.

. . . . . .

At tea the amazing spectacle—taken quite calmly by everybody—of the re-united St. Amants smiling at one another and at their children. Peggy, a pale, grave child with coal-black hair, enthroned on a sofa with pillows and an eiderdown. Her devoted slave, feeding her with dainties and giving her news of her pony, was a fair, bald man, inclined to stoutness; his red face clean-shaven, his cloudy blue eyes declining to look at you. He would drop his eyelashes and smile in your direction,

so to speak. If you chose to take it as meant for you, you might.

"Not happy and not good," Camilla decided, though why he wasn't happy she was at a loss to know, when he had just effected a reconciliation with his wife in record time—really with a quickness and completeness to stagger any one who remembered the Engadine days, and the domesticities enacted on that different stage, with a slight but notable rearrangement in the cast.

It was an afternoon of shocks.

Before tea was over a footman came hurrying in to tell Mr. Nancarrow an urgent telephone call had come for him.

"Oh, I'm not—" Michael began. "You haven't said I was at home!"

"Y-yes, sir."

"Well, you had no business to!"

Michael spoke with less patience than Camilla had yet heard him. She felt the little shock of the person who receives for the first time an intimation that a certain fine equanimity is exposed to such jars as wait on the daily lot of all.

"Where is the message from?"

"Felton, sir."

Michael got up at once and left the room.

He came back with a harassed look, and news of an accident.

"Phyllis's boy thrown off his horse an hour or so ago. Concussion. She's naturally . . . I've ordered the car." He turned away from his mother to Camilla. Felton was forty miles away. He might be kept at his cousin's all night. Phyllis was alone with two very young children, in addition to this boy, a fine little chap of ten. It was terrible.

"I don't see why she must send for *you*," said Michael's mother.

"I do," said Alice; and in her heart Camilla echoed

her. What a blessed comfort to have Michael to turn to! When there was trouble, of course eyes turned to Nancarrow, just as they had, hundreds of years before, when trouble came over the border.

As the door closed: "The boy is Michael's godchild," his mother excused him.

"That much for the god-child!" Alice said, flicking her fingers. "The place is full of Michael's god-children."

A look from her mother checked her. But *sotto voce* she went on in Camilla's ear: "Phyllis was in love with Michael before she married. And the dear goose doesn't know it to this day."

"Where is the husband?" Mrs. Williamson-Ames inquired.

"Elk-hunting in Arabia—or wild-goose chasing in Kamchatka—" They talked on, while the sense of Michael's absence grew heavier moment by moment, pressing on Camilla like a palpable and obscurely frightening burden.

How far she had come already, when this man's few hours' absence could so appal her!

"Climbing about the tower is very tiring," said his mother, looking at Camilla kindly. "Perhaps you'd like to rest?"

Under cover of the children's entrance she made her escape.

In the middle of the hall, stood Michael fiddling with his gloves, eyes on the drawing-room door.

"Oh, *here* you are! I thought . . . I wondered if you wouldn't just see me off. Two minutes, Jackson!" he called to the servant standing at the front door with a rug over his arm.

The first thing Camilla knew, without word or sign, Michael's leather-coated figure was drawing her by invisible bands down the corridor towards the smoking-room. All her being was in turmoil—one thing only salient,

clear. Like a headland on a dangerous coast, that figure—safe to steer by.

Voices in the smoking-room. "Oh, the devil!" He turned suddenly and under his breath: "Job hasn't been in it with me for patience! But I'm at an end. Give me my reward!"

Not the heightened colour on his face, nor the shining eyes accounted for that transfigured look. An inner light seemed to shine out through the thin fine skin. "Give me something," he bent his face to hers, "something to carry away."

"Any one would think you were going on some long journey—"

"Doesn't it seem like that to you—*doesn't* it?"

"I . . . I'm afraid it does." She felt extremely like crying.

His rapture at the confession! She put up her hands to push his face away. He covered the hands with kisses. "How you could say we hadn't known each other long! . . . I've loved you for six years."

"Six years!"

"But I wasn't a free man in the Florida days. You weren't a free woman. Now—"

"Some one may come," she struggled gently to free herself.

"But let me hear it first. You'll marry me, Camilla?"

"I . . ." she began. "You oughtn't to ask me like this."

"Why not?" he held her.

She made an immense effort. "It's like being asked to make your will while you're running to catch the train."

His delight reached her in the low, deep laugh smothered against her hair. "Catching the train—for Paradise. That's how I feel, too."

"But . . . it makes me forget . . . you ought to know things I can't say all breathless like this."

"Of course I must know . . . everything!" A ring of such confident happiness in his voice that she turned startled eyes towards the smoking-room.

The voices sounded louder suddenly.

Michael drew her rapidly back towards the hall. He had carried her hand up under his arm and laid it across his lips. "And then . . . without waiting, without fuss, we'll be married. Say it's to be like that!"

"If you still—"

"Oh, my beautiful!"

And then she was alone.

CHAPTER V

THE glow of those last moments was still with her when she came down to dinner.

The Jardine party was a few minutes late. Mrs. Dick entered with her spoilt-child air, and on her way to her hostess embraced Mrs. Williamson-Ames with effusion.

Mrs. Nancarrow swept the party into the dining-room without waiting to introduce the late comers. The two Americans found themselves on the same side of the table at opposite ends, each out of the line of the other's vision.

It wasn't till the women were all back in the drawing-room that Mrs. Dick, staring about with her great eyes, said suddenly: "Who's that?"

"Why do you ask?" said Mrs. Williamson-Ames, with her intelligent smile.

"Well, who is she? I have a feeling I *ought* to know her—"

"She doesn't know you, so she says. But she's read about you in the papers, she *thinks*."

"What did you say her name was?"

"Trenholme."

"Not Mrs. Leroy Trenholme! Goodness gracious mercy me!"

"You know anything about her?"

"Do I know. . . . *Well!* wasn't New York ringing with the Leroy Trenholmes' affairs, and wasn't her picture and his—*all* their pictures—in every paper you picked up! Columns and columns about her and her—"

Mrs. Williamson-Ames drew Mrs. Dick into a far corner and kept her for five or six remunerative minutes, sitting on a little sofa behind the grand piano, before Alice found them out.

"Have you brought Mrs. Trenholme?" Lily Jardine demanded. "Why *should* you bring her?" she laughed brightly. "Why, because I'm dying to know her! *Do* bring her over here."

Camilla had no idea for what purpose she and her coffee cup were removed from the pleasant group at the fire, till Alice pushed up a chair for her by the newcomer's side.

"I've been so *longing* to make your acquaintance," Mrs. Jardine began with extreme graciousness, and as Mrs. Trenholme seemed not to know the proper return for that, it was for the older resident to put the new one at her ease. "I've heard about your lovely house, and I'd like to show you mine," the little lady ran on. "We're in Smith Square. Horrid name, isn't it?—when you think of the *beautiful* names thrown away on alleys and mews." Still she got no change out of this noncommittal customer. "There was a mews," Mrs. Dick thrust into the gap, "opposite the first house I ever stayed in over here. One of our party stood at the window on a foggy afternoon and read the name out loud. The 'Duchess Mews.' Why, oh, why does the Duchess mew? Is she an exiled American? But *do* come and see me and my baby. Dick, too—Dick would *love* to know you." Oh, she began with all good intent. If only she had had the smallest help!

"It's extraordinary, isn't it, that we've never met?"

Camilla opened her black gauze fan: "I don't go out a great deal."

"Oh, but I mean at home, both being Southerners." Full stop at that. Still she waited.

"You are from Mississippi, I think?"

"Yes, but Florida is next door," Mrs. Dick smiled ingratiatingly. "It's all the same thing *really,* isn't it?"

"Florida and Mississippi?"

She *was* dull.

"I mean it's all the *South.* Where the—a—the atmos-

phere''—she waved a very small hand adorned with very large jewels—''is *so* different, isn't it?''

''Different from what?''

''Why, from the North.'' She almost snapped it out, forgetting the new softness of speech she had adopted since meeting Mrs. Trenholme. Then, making a sudden dash at the semi-confidential, ''Don't you just hate Yankees?''

''Some of my best friends—''

''Oh, yes, of course. Mine too. But you'll admit they're quite unlike *us!*''

Mrs. Trenholme wasted too much time considering the obvious. Mrs. Dick helped her out. ''So hard. So cold. So—a—commercial. The ve'y sound of the voices down Sa-outh—don't you adaw it?''

Mrs. Trenholme smiled, wondering a little at the change which had overtaken the lady's own speech. The accent with which she had arrived was not bad, and not markedly sectional. You would have said ''she is probably American.'' Not even an American would have been sure from what part. But now she was addressing Mrs. Trenholme in a drawling, niggerfied English that made Alice St. Amant sit up, and regard the lady with astonished interest.

''Do tell us about the South! I've always thought I might like *the South,*'' she said with a Mason and Dixon definiteness.

Mrs. Dick was sure Lady St. Amant would adaw the Sa-outh, and told her why, flattening the vowels, softening the edges of speech, cooing out her passionate affection for every sound and every sight of her native Sa-outh.

''The beautiful old-world manners!'' She had modified her own up-to-date sprightliness to a languorous assumption of what she imagined people meant when they said ''old school.'' The only aristocracy in America was in the Sa-outh. ''Don't you find that so?''

"I am afraid," said her compatriot, "I only know one corner of Florida. There is not much aristocracy there. Poor whites."

"But *you* are there. F.F.V.'s, don't you call yourselves?"

"I never heard us," said the literal creature.

"Oh . . . !" Mrs. Dick was left blank for a moment, and then: "I suppose, like us, you've got some of your old slaves?" She seemed afraid of another check if she waited to hear. She went on with a sing-song sweetness to tell about her old black Mammy.

Mrs. Trenholme had been growing quieter and quieter, duller and duller.

"And you are still very English, aren't you, in the real South," suggested Lady St. Amant.

"Oh, qui-ite."

"And you," Alice sought to draw Camilla back into the conversation, "you find that, too?"

"In Florida? Oh, no."

"No? I thought you had fox-hunting and shooting, and all that sort of thing down there?"

"There is hunting and shooting," the maddening creature managed to admit, "but you wouldn't call it very 'English.'"

Alice tried a different tack. "You do have funny ways, don't you? I once met a Southerner at Cannes—"

"'Funny ways!'" Some of the languor vanished from Mrs. Dick. What did Lady St. Amant mean by funny ways?

"Well, the girl, I mean—she was called Wild Rose Robinson. She *was* queer. I had a little golden Pekinese, and she called it a yeller dawg."

"What an idea!" said Mrs. Dick, revolted.

"I've often heard people say yeller dawg in Florida," volunteered Mrs. Trenholme.

"Now you're what Wild Rose Robinson used to call 'funning,'" Alice went on gaily. "She had one habit

she told me was very Southern. And I hope you'll forgive me if I say it's a dirty, greasy habit. Wild Rose used to wash her face in buttermilk."

Mrs. Dick had never heard of such a thing in Mississippi— "A little eau de Cologne, perhaps, in the bath—"

"And terribly concerned about her hands," Alice went on—with a side glance at Mrs. Dick. "Wild Rose Robinson" (she repeated the name as often as possible and with increasing gusto), "Wild Rose Robinson used to go to bed in gloves."

"Oh, she must have been mad," said Mrs. Dick with decision.

"Well, I don't know that I'd go so far as *that*. The first time I saw her in bed with gloves on, I said: 'Bite your nails, do you?' She was furious! So I said she must be a specially bad case, '. . . the kind that gnaws the ends off their gloves!' She was a very wild Rose that morning; she had a beast of a temper. She said *that* was Southern, too. *Is* it?" Alice demanded.

Mrs. Dick looked at the tepid face of her compatriot and then found her own in the great pier glass. "Yes," she said with a flash: "The Southerners *are* quick. High-spirited, you know."

"Oh! well, Camilla dear, I hope you won't suddenly be taken like Wild Rose Robinson. . . . She used to throw the china at her brother Launcelot. What do you think she called that? 'Me and Launcelot havin' a regular monkey and a parrot of a time!'

"Fwightfully common, she sounds—don't you think so, Mrs. Trenholme?"

Camilla smiled.

"Oh, no!" said Alice liberally; "not really common at all. But I wish I could remember the funny things that girl used to say." With one of her quick turns: "I expect *you* said some of them," she assured the visitor, "when you first came over."

Mrs. Dick stiffened her back and sat up very straight under the shock.

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean. I talked Southern, of course. I suppose we both did more then than *some* of us do now." She flashed a look at the renegade.

"Oh! if you mean Camilla, she's nearly as funny as Wild Rose Robinson," Lady St. Amant assured Mrs. Dick. "What do *you* call boot-laces?"

"I call them boot-laces," was the dignified answer.

"Well, Camilla calls them shoe-strings."

"*Does* she!" exclaimed Mrs. Dick, with eyes quite enormous. She turned from her eccentric countrywoman and stuck her bewitching little nose in the air.

"And what should you say Camilla calls that?" Alice thrust out a satin-shod foot.

Mrs. Dick's beautiful little head on its long stalk of a neck tilted sideways, as much as to confess it very hard to say what so eccentric an individual as Mrs. Trenholme might take it into her head to call anything. "Perhaps I don't know," she smiled, "but *I* call it a satin shoe."

"Yes, yes," said the ruthless Alice. "But before you came to England what did you call it?"

"I *always* called it a satin shoe," said the irate lady with biting emphasis.

"Well, Camilla calls it a slipper!" Alice laughed her mischievous laugh.

"So does Cinderella," said Camilla doggedly.

Really, such childishness!—Mrs. Richard Jardine had had enough of it. She gathered her great white marabout boa about her, and looked significantly at Mrs. Williamson-Ames.

Obedient to the signal, that lady half rose to rescue her friend. But not before Alice had inquired, with the eagerness of one athirst for knowledge:

"Well, you say 'waist,' don't you, for bodice?"

"Not in the South."

"We do in Florida," said the base Camilla.

"*Really!*" inquired Mrs. Dick, with her eyelids drooped.

Alice and Mrs. Williamson-Ames exchanged a wicked look. The contagion of malice is often carried so.

"I thought I'd heard *you* say shirt-waist, Lily," remarked Mrs. Williamson-Ames.

"You are thinking of some one else," said her friend.

Into the slightly-strained pause Mrs. Trenholme dropped her gloomy contribution: "You don't all say bodice. I asked an old English lady on board ship once, if she could tell me the time. She told me I must wait a moment till she got her body open."

They all laughed at that except Camilla—though in truth every one except Alice had had enough of this form of entertainment. Both Mrs. Williamson-Ames and her friend had risen.

"I suppose *you'd* say," Alice glinted at Mrs. Dick, "the Americans don't call a lift an elevator?"

"What I'd say is the Americans had a purrfect right to name their own inventions," retorted the exasperated young woman. Nevertheless her most inimical eye she cast not on Lady St. Amant, but on the anything but fiery-spirited Southerner who had failed Mrs. Dick at every point. "How often do you go home?" she demanded.

Camilla confessed she had not been home for six years. "Since *you* love it so," she added, "I suppose you often go back—?"

"Me? Oh, I'm tied. Wait till *you* marry an Englishman! Then you'll understand."

Mrs. Nancarrow, according to Mrs. Williamson-Ames, was pining to hear about the Jardine baby. Mrs. Dick was conveyed to the sofa near the hostess. Alice followed, and Camilla was left to Nelly and Blanche. At

Nancarrow to be left to Nelly and Blanche was to be abandoned.

Moreover, Camilla had the strongest impression that the conversation over by the fire was not about the Jardine baby.

. . . . . .

The men lingered long in the dining-room that night.

Oh, for Michael! She wished she hadn't been told his cousin was in love with him. How was she going to get through the time till he returned? A sense of loneliness greater and more daunting than she had known for years, seemed with icy hands to be pushing her away from all these pleasant people—pushing her into some outer place where she stood friendless and in tears.

Tears? Heaven above!—a dreadful panic seized her lest she shouldn't be able to keep down the rising flood. Her efforts gave her an air of guilty preoccupation.

What were they talking about over there by the fire?

. . . . . .

Camilla shivered inwardly in the chill that followed the departure of the Jardines.

Alice kissed her hurriedly. "I must go and see if Peggy's asleep."

Her husband also, he must go to Peggy.

Camilla found herself mounting the stairs along with old Mrs. Nancarrow. No pretence of conversation. No word, till at the door of Camilla's bedroom, she paused a moment with "Good night."

"Won't you come in?" said the guest, to her own great surprise, for she hadn't meant in the very least to say anything of the kind. "Alice," she went on apologetically, "usually comes in for a minute or two."

"Oh, Alice! She likes talking all night." But the angular figure with the candle and the big work-bag crossed the threshold and walked slowly to the fireplace.

Camilla drew up an easy chair. But Mrs. Nancarrow, though she had set down the candle, just stood there, facing the fire.

"Personally I shouldn't be inclined to believe anything that woman said." She lifted her eyes to Camilla, who leant against the end of the mantelpiece. "Your Mrs. Jardine I'm talking about."

"Not *my* Mrs. Jardine, please."

The old eyes, having found Camilla's face, rested there. "How long has your husband been dead?"

"He is not dead."

They stood quite silent, looking each in the other's face, till Mrs. Nancarrow said quietly: "We understood you were a widow."

"*You,* perhaps—"

"There is no 'perhaps' about it," said Mrs. Nancarrow sharply.

"You, yes, yes. Not the others."

"Most certainly they did."

"Not your s— Well, anyhow, your daughter knew."

"I can only assure you," said Mrs. Nancarrow with dignity, "that the information has amazed Alice."

"It isn't—it can't be—" Camilla stopped before the sudden anger in the old lady's eyes. "I must ask you to believe," she said miserably, "I was under the strongest impression that Alice knew. And, caring as she does for her brother, if no one else had told him, *she* must. Or, so I thought."

"Forgive me if I say you should have made sure." She took up her candle. There was a dour finality in the way old Mrs. Nancarrow turned away from the fire. Her "good-night" nod, across the candle flame, seemed to dismiss the stranger. This Mrs. Trenholme was here under false pretences. And so an end.

"In America," Camilla said miserably, "they tell me I make too much of divorce. You seem to think I should make more."

"What I think is, that entire frankness in such an unfortunate contingency is always best."

The "unfortunate" jarred harshly. Camilla made no effort to disguise either her agitation or her unhappiness as she went with Michael's mother towards the door. She longed inexpressibly to ask her to be a little gentle—to try to understand how storm-tossed she had been. As Mrs. Nancarrow, with her hands full, waited for the door to be opened, Camilla came closer to confession than she had ever found herself. "At first," she said, "I couldn't care what anybody thought over here."

Mrs. Nancarrow looked amazement over the top of her spectacles.

"Yes, it's true. For *years* I couldn't care. Though all the same I used to go sometimes thrusting the fact in people's faces, and sometimes feeling: what does it matter to anybody but me?"

"*That,*" said Mrs. Nancarrow, "was scarcely the frame of mind to bring here."

"Oh, it changed before ever I came here! You must know that! I had come to feel that it mattered so very, very much that . . . well, it was harder than ever to talk about. And I was so convinced you all knew. So many people in London know. My—Leroy has a good many English friends. They know. I don't, even now, understand how Alice—"

"I am afraid I can't discuss that," Mrs. Nancarrow made a gesture of dignified impatience at the delay in opening the door.

Camilla laid her hand on the knob, and still she did not turn it. In broken phrases she said she could not let her shrinking from talk about that old unhappiness be misunderstood. "*One* thing," she said with lips that trembled, *one* thing Mrs. Nancarrow must know. She brought this out as if producing her credentials, proud, and if anxious too, only because of all that hung on her true position being understood.

She herself, she said, had done the divorcing.

"Why?"

"Because my—he,"—she stumbled on some painful difficulty in bringing out the words—"he cared more about somebody else."

Camilla would have been passionately grateful for the least sign of sympathy. She would have welcomed even curiosity. As little of one as the other in that face. Mrs. Nancarrow would waste no instant's thought on those happenings, "unfortunate" and remote. All that concerned her was that a woman had gained entrance here—worst of all, had "got hold of Michael" on a presumption that proved unfounded. If they had been misled about one thing—a crucial matter like this—where *were* they with this person? If only they might be nowhere at all, so much the better. The gesture of the arm that held the work-bag swept the field clear.

"You must see that, what you yourself have said is the case, quite alters the situation."

She left Camilla to dwell on that saying through the night watches.

. . . . . .

Her sharpest anxiety was lest she shouldn't get away before Michael came back. At breakfast the next morning she looked up from a letter she had just opened, to say that her sister was unexpectedly coming over from Paris that night. She herself must be in London to meet her. Yes, time was important. Her sister was sailing by the next boat. *Could* Mrs. Nancarrow manage to send her to catch the morning train?

There were expressions of civil regret.

Diana remonstrated stoutly, and followed Mrs. Trenholme upstairs. Discouraged by the lady's silence, Diana sped on down the corridor to tell her mother, who, in a fit of discretion, had asked for breakfast in her own room.

Alice came running to Camilla in dressing-gown and

with hair abroad. "You won't," she besought, "you can't be going to spoil everything! Your 'sister'! Don't talk nonsense to me. You're going because that little hell-cat last night—"

"I thought—*do* believe me!"—Camilla's eyes filled—"I *really* didn't know but what you knew—"

"And so I did!"

"What!"

Alice evaded the amazed reproach: "If my mother," she grumbled, "had known as many Americans as I, she'd *expect* 'em to be divorced."

"You *knew!* Then why did you pretend—"

"I as good as knew. Only one hears so much . . . and I wasn't bound to believe it as long as you hadn't said anything."

"You knew!" Camilla sat down with her hands crossed, staring at the floor.

"My dear child, you must take the world as you find it. My mother belongs to a past age. She would never have invited you here if the first thing she'd known about you had been—*that*. But I was convinced all you needed was a chance to win them over. You *will* win them over. Wait. Sit tight. You'll see, they'll calm down." But she read no yielding in the face. "If you go," she threatened, "it's all up!"

The maid came in with an armful of clothing. "There is no need for *you* to hurry," said Mrs. Trenholme. "You can come on by the later train."

The woman deposited the things and shut the door. Mrs. Trenholme began to put on her hat.

"Oh, *don't* go!" wailed Alice. She put her arms round Camilla. "I shall be miserable if you go."

"Oh, no, you won't! You've got—your husband."

Alice gave her a queer look as she unclasped her arms. It wasn't a pleasant look.

Behind the ruins of Camilla's own happiness, that look, vaguely sinister, haunted her all the way to London.

CHAPTER VI

"SHE has certainly just come in or just gone out. I saw the motor drive away." Lady St. Amant brushed past the butler and ran upstairs, before that dignified personage could frame a protest. "Oh, *there* you are!"

Camilla, in her hat and furs, was passing the drawing-room door on the way up to her bedroom. She stood like a person arrested in flight, but her face said nothing.

"My *dear!*" Alice flew to embrace her. She pressed her rosy cheek against Camilla's face. "How white you are, poor darling!"

Camilla returned the kiss and gently disengaged herself. "When did you see me anything but white?"

"Now, now! you're not to stiffen your spine as if you thought I was Michael's ambassadress." The only answer was the opening of the drawing-room door. "Is *that* why I'm brought in here like some stranger paying a first visit? I give you my word," she turned and faced her friend, "Michael didn't ask me to come."

Camilla threw her stole over the back of a chair. "I never thought he had."

"Oh! as to that, would it be so unnatural?"

"For Michael? Very, I should say."

Camilla's proprietary air argued well. Alice smiled as she sat down and drew off her gloves. "Anyway I'm here on my own," she said with the ease of her slang. "But, all the same, I can't have you breaking Michael's heart." She waited. "You don't *want*, I suppose, to break his heart?"

"You know the answer to that."

"Perhaps *I* do. But I doubt if he does. And that's just the point. He's coming to London tonight." She

dropped into another pause, and as that elicited nothing, she bent forward to say with smiling earnestness: "You'll see him? You won't keep him in suspense—"

"I'm going out," said Camilla awkwardly.

Alice smiled. A ruse of Camilla's was always so ridiculously transparent. "To dine?"

". . . and to 'Tannhäuser.' "

"Oh! . . . Anybody staying here?"

"N . . . not at the moment. But I'm expecting—"

"Where Michael will be staying I don't know," Alice interrupted. "I'm to ring him up at the Club and tell him . . . tell him where I'll be." She waited, rolling up the veil she had taken off. "Are you having tea soon?"

Camilla's eyes went to the clock. She seemed about to point out the early hour. Then with apologetic haste, "But of course! You're tired after that journey." She rang the bell.

"Such a brute of a day! What were you doing out in the rain?"

"Matching silks." She undid a little parcel.

"Pure restlessness, *I* know. You Americans are as much afraid of getting wet as any cat. Partly your clothes, I suppose." She went on making conversation while the servants came in and out. The maid appeared and took Mrs. Trenholme's hat and wraps.

"Mine too, please, Parsons."

"Where shall I leave them, m'lady?"

"Oh!—a—" Alice looked round as if waiting for some suggestion. Then a little sharply: "Anywhere."

The maid glanced at the expressionless face of her mistress and went out with her arms full.

"When the footman comes back, do you mind saying you're not at home? Till six anyway, unless—" (Alice brought in her main point, postscriptwise) "unless Lionel should come."

Camilla gave her a quick look, and then with lowered

eyes: "I'm not expecting Lord Harborough," she said.

"Oh! see here. I know you're not very happy yourself, but it isn't like you to make that a reason for being disagreeable."

"I could bear being what you call disagreeable. What I don't like is seeming to interfere in . . ." She broke off and turned to the fire.

Alice was on her feet. "What is it, dearest?" The two stood shoulder to shoulder looking into the blaze. "Tell me."

"I . . . thought . . ." the words came out heavily, "when I saw you and your husband together at Nancarrow, I was sure you had made it up with him."

"Made it up! There wasn't any need to make up. We've never fallen out."

"You mean . . . he still has no idea!"

"On the contrary, he has a very clear idea."

Camilla's gaze widened. "How long has he known?"

"Oh, for years!"

"'*Years?*'" She swallowed the astonishment of that revelation, and then in a whisper: "You mean he doesn't mind?"

"What he can't help? No. Richard is a very sensible, rather nice person."

Camilla left the fire and went over to the window. The rain fell heavily.

Alice spoke in an undertone to the footman who brought in the tea.

"Yes, m'lady."

Camilla turned from the grey world outside, hesitated a moment with knitted brows, and then took her place by the tea urn.

Alice had already possessed herself of a roll of bread and butter. She smiled over it at her friend. "Don't look like that! You were so nice and sympathetic abroad."

"I was more abroad than you guessed."

"How was that, dear child?"

"I thought you and Lord Harborough had only just found each other. That you'd be coming home to get a divorce—"

"Oh, *did* you?" With her little air of smiling superiority she set the issue firmly on one side. "Whatever the reason was, you were a great dear. Lionel quite loves you. If it was anybody but you, I'd be jealous."

But Camilla's anxious gravity was beyond the reach of blandishment. "Your love story *did* catch hold of me. Most of all, I think, because you weren't young—"

"Thank you, darling!" A peal of good-humoured laughter filled the room. And when her sobering came it came as though at the prompting of affectionate solicitude. Her cheerful concern was not, you would say, in the remotest degree for herself. It was all for Camilla.

And indeed, Camilla, palpably struggling to clear away the closer gathering mists, presented a somewhat humorous picture to the lucid and fearless mind. Only a sense of ineluctable need brought her to make the second of those rare attempts at confession. "I'd been thinking for six years that everything was over for me—"

"At the ripe age of twenty-two!" Alice threw in.

". . . and then I saw that you . . . yes, you gave me a feeling that this life must be a richer, hopefuller thing than I'd thought, when a woman could find . . . what you'd found, after forty. It made me feel less old."

"I seem to have been as unexplained to you, as you were to me. After all," Alice waved her hand as if to put these trifles behind them, "there isn't any general belief more unfounded, is there, dearest, than that women tell one another their every thought?"

"We don't seem to have," Camilla agreed moodily.

"Of course you haven't!" Again Alice airily shifted the burden. "Very few do if they've anything worth telling."

Was this an invitation to leave the mystery where it was? Would Alice have been franker to one of her own compatriots? Camilla drew back aghast before the old familiar pit. She was *useful.*

"What are you looking like that for?" Alice's patience was wearing thin. "Do be reasonable. You know why I couldn't talk as openly as I might have liked. It wasn't as if I'd been you, a perfectly free woman. Yet even you, did you ever tell me about your husband?"

"Well, you know now," said Camilla quickly.

"What do I know?"

"The main thing." She turned her head away. "The only thing that concerns other people."

"Exactly. You've told me only what you couldn't keep." In the pause Alice realized the conversation was slipping back into acrimony. That wasn't at all what she had come for. She put out her hand and closed it over Camilla's. "It's partly my fault. I made you think I was more self-centred than I am. I've often quite longed to ask you . . . things. What was he like—your husband?"

Camilla pushed away her untasted cup. "I'm no good at describing people." She got up and took a piece of embroidery out of a work table.

Alice watched her laying the new silks against the old. "I'm sure of one thing. He was horrid."

Camilla looked up with a queer defensive look. "Horrid?"

"Yes, or else you wouldn't have let him go. You had it in your hands, after all."

"He wasn't the least horrid. Anything *but*—" She checked herself, and bent her head again over the silks.

Alice stared at the averted profile. "You didn't want to divorce him?"

Only the lips moved: "No."

"Then why in Heaven's name . . ." Alice jumped up and came to her friend's side. She gave Camilla's

arm a little shake in her excitement. "Why did you do it, then? Really, now?"

"I've told you."

"No; only why he wanted the divorce. Not why you agreed."

"I wouldn't at first."

"What made you in the end?"

"Because," she said with her simpleton look, "he made such a point of it."

"He . . ." Alice St. Amant gasped. "He made such a p—!" She broke into a peal of laughter. She flung herself into a chair and abandoned herself to merriment. "Really, you *are* . . .! how any man could part with such a priceless creature—!"

Camilla sat down on the sofa and began to untwist a skein of silk.

"Forgive me, darling," Alice gathered herself together and wiped her eyes. "Camilla, I adore you!" She had slid down on the lion skin at Camilla's feet and tried to take her hand. "Don't punish my levity. The fact is, your kind of calmness has the odd effect of making me a little hysterical. Look, I'm crying quite as much as I'm laughing." She held both the hands caught in the skein of silk. "It's wonderful to have such a power as you have of setting yourself aside and thinking yourself into some one else. No wonder Michael worships you. Darling Camilla! As I look back over the months we've known one another I see you now clearly for the first time. By the light of what you've just said. And what I see is, you are the most unselfish person I've ever known."

The hands Camilla drew away were shaking. "You were never more mistaken in your life. I didn't know what I was about when I . . . did what Leroy wanted."

"Didn't you understand he meant to marry the other woman?"

"I'm not thinking," she said with a passion that belied

her, "not thinking about any other woman. I'm thinking about me. I didn't know how bad it was going to be for me. I thought I did. No, I didn't know."

"You mean what you've lost socially?"

She seemed not to hear. "If I had it to do over again, I wouldn't."

"Wouldn't have divorced him!"

"No, I wouldn't have divorced him. *That's* how unselfish I am."

Alice pursed her lips; very nearly she whistled. Then with one of those quick turns, her mouth widened again to an impish laugh. "In short, the trouble with both our husbands seems to be they're too bright and good for human nature's daily food!" She bent to look into the averted face. No ghost of an answering smile there. "Oh, dear!" she sighed for the thousandth time at Camilla's blindness to the *vis comica*. "I expect you said that just to make me think losing Michael would be quite a secondary thing. Stiff upper lip, eh?"

Camilla's little gesture seemed more fatigue than denial. She leaned her head on the back of the sofa.

"Yes," Alice went on; "that's why you sit there trying to persuade yourself that 'if you'd known' . . . Well, listen to me. You *haven't* lost Michael."

Out of the pause Camilla's voice seemed to come from far away. "I told Leroy last spring—"

"You keep on meeting!" Alice sat up.

"Only that once. We had to settle some business about a will. It was at the American Consulate. I told him then if I had it to do over . . . I *wouldn't.*"

Alice stared at the desolate white face. "I hadn't a notion you minded so. All the same, I used to wonder why a woman like you submitted to such a life. It was unnatural—at your age. Of course, living alone like that, you kept going over the past." Alice leaned forward with ill-suppressed eagerness. "And that's what I really came for. To cheer you on."

"To cheer me?" said the other with unlit gloom.

"Yes, you dear person." She sat on the sofa and put an arm round Camilla. "And to tell you I'd stand by you."

The dark eyes turned on her wondering.

"It will be much simpler for you," Alice went on eagerly. "Oh, *much* simpler than it's been for me. You see," she put her own interpretation on Camilla's bewilderment, "*you*'ve got everything in your favour and no responsibilities."

"What *are* you talking about?"

"About you and Michael, of course. Why should you go on being lonely and he being miserable?" Camilla sat rigid. "There's no reason on earth why you and Michael shouldn't see as much of one another as ever you like."

"Just as you and Lord Harborough do?" she asked after a pause.

"Oh, much more easily than poor Lionel and I. Nobody has the smallest right to haul *you* over the coals. If anybody dared to, *you* could afford to snap your fingers. All that money, no children, and no—well, an American."

Camilla got up, looking stupidly in front of her, and all the coloured silks slipped down to the lion's skin.

Alice rose too. But for Camilla's impassive face, Alice would have gone more warily. But Camilla's looks gave you no warning. In the absence of finger-posts, Alice rushed on:

"Heavens! what wouldn't many a woman give to be in your boots. More than anybody *I*'ve ever known, you're your own mistress . . ." She stopped short as she met Camilla's gaze. What on earth was the matter? —for at last some dawning of her deep trouble had reached the surface. It shone in the sombre eyes.

"Yes, my *own* 'mistress,' " she said.

For the first time Alice looked at her friend uneasily.

But Camilla, still with that misleading quietness, went on after the slightest possible pause:

"Did you tell Peters to bring Lord Harborough up, if he came?"

"Yes." Not Camilla, something in the air carried chill. Alice gave her friend a quick look. "Surely you don't mind, dearest?"

"I—am—afraid—I—do." Camilla's low staccato brought the words out with obvious effort.

"What's happened?" Alice demanded with sudden sharpness. "What's different?"

"When he used to come before, I didn't understand—"

"Understand what, in Heaven's name?"

"I didn't understand," . . . she found the words with difficulty, "that you weren't going through with it."

"God bless me, we *have* gone through with it! As far as—as far as circumstances allow."

In the pause Camilla stood motionless. Yet Alice flung out a hand as though to stem a torrent.

"You stand there and tell me that, after everything, you don't want Lionel to come here?"

"I'm sorry, I don't want to hurt your feelings."

Alice's eyes glinted. "Has it occurred to you that if you won't have Lionel, you mightn't have me?"

"Yes," Camilla said dully, "that has occurred to me. I'd be sorry."

Actually she was accepting the alternative!

"Perhaps you haven't realized that doing without me might mean doing without Michael?"

"Yes, I know how you all hold together."

The door opened: "Lord Harborough!" Peters announced.

Alice went to meet him with all her practised ease untarnished. "How nice and prompt of you, Lionel! Camilla—" she turned her head. "You'll find Camilla just a little out of sorts."

"How do you do?" said the hostess.

"I'm not going to tell you what she's been saying, because I think she'll be glad I didn't, by and by."

Instead of going forward to meet Harborough, Camilla made her way out through the folding doors into the back drawing-room.

Anything that wore less the look of turning a man out of your house was never done. She realized that, as she paused after the doors were shut, hesitating where to take herself. She stood with locked fingers, going through the little scene again in imagination. That shamefaced "how do you do," as she glided past, seemed to put her alone in the wrong. Instead of turning him out, she had turned herself out.

Always, always she was inadequate.

People dared say anything to her, it appeared. They didn't respect her. She was fit only to be used. She remembered the Langtons. How that first year in England they "ran" her. Or more explicitly, induced her to run them. Filled her opera box; overflowed her suite at Claridge's; went about in her car; Camilla herself often reduced to taxis. They had found a country house for her—or, as it turned out, for the Langtons. It must be she had no character, that she put up with such imposition. She forgot that doing these things for an agreeable family, whose place in the world was ampler than their income, had pleased her at the time; forgot the Langton girls had really cared for her, and the pleasure that knowledge had been; remembered only that she had been called "the Langtons' milch cow." They might be milking her still, had not the Rev. Lord William Cottenham begun to ignore Muriel Langton and devote himself to Mrs. Trenholme. It was then the Langtons suddenly woke up to the fact that their American friend was a *divorcée*. Exit the Langtons with the Rev. Lord William.

Through the closed doors she heard the hum of pleas-

ant voices. They were in no hurry to go. Yet she dared not so much as seek refuge in her bedroom for fear of running into those two as she passed the door. *Their* door! They would be so sure at the critical moment to come out of it. She looked cautiously into the hall. It would be safer, she decided, to go down. The little tapestry room—yes! As she fled down the stair, she caught sight of luggage in the lower hall. She stopped and leaned over the banisters. *Could* it be? Yes, Alice's monogram. She had meant to stay. Alice's plans had very much gone agley! Just beyond the pile of luggage . . . whose feet were those? She was about to speak Peters's name, but she could hear Peters at the telephone. She leaned farther out over the banister. A man in a mackintosh—Michael! His head bent, writing a note on the back of his pocket-book. Michael, come to—! She turned and fled, noiseless, up four or five steps. Those others up there! She stopped again. Perhaps Michael had already seen her. She leaned over once more, torn between hesitation and a longing for flight; for that solitude she had so misprized; for the dark where she might weep unseen. Oh, for a hole to creep into!

Still he stood there with his head bent, quietly writing. She wavered again, full of a wondering wretchedness. He looked a different breed from Alice. *Was* he as different in mind as he was in feature?

Oh, these English! What other folk produced such men? All Nancarrow seemed incarnate in this son of hers. The look of race—the air of being at home wherever he might be, *that* most of all appealed to the soul which was homeless everywhere and nowhere more than at home.

What had he come for? A wave of shame swept her as she remembered Alice's plan. Had he indeed come for that?

As he turned the half sheet he was writing on, he lifted

his eyes. "Camilla!" The face lit up. Could a man look like that who—

"This *is* a piece of luck!" He slipped off his wet coat while she hastened down, saying, breathless: "I can't let you stay—not now."

"What's the matter?" He followed as she backed towards the tapestry room. "I simply must speak to you a minute." He interposed between her and the door.

" 'Sh! Speak low." She glanced anxiously up the stair.

"Of course I won't stay but a minute now, as you've got people here—"

"You know who."

"How should I?"

"Aren't you expecting a message at your club?"

"Message? No." He swept the enigma aside. "Camilla!"

She watched him with wary eyes. Was it coming? Would he show the cloven foot?

"You didn't really think I'd let you go for ever, just because we're old-fashioned people at Nancarrow, and don't take instantly to new ways?"

"What new ways?" she demanded.

He never troubled to answer.

"You'll see. It will all come right, once we are married."

"Married?"

He laughed his low, delicious laugh. "I think I mentioned the word before. Dear—" his breath was on her face.

She half closed her eyes with a sense of exquisite faintness. But she opened them suddenly and again looked up the stair. "I couldn't," she whispered. "Don't you know you'd feel it dreadfully, going against your mother and your brother and—and everybody?"

"I don't think about that at all."

"Yes, I was afraid so," she said sadly.

"Does *anybody* when he's being caught up to Paradise, keep thinking about the earth?"

"We *have* to think"; she seemed to admonish herself.

"Exactly. We are going to think about being married."

"I . . . I can't say tonight."

"You must say tonight. Or rather, you needn't."

"Oh, I needn't!"

"Needn't say it over, because you've said it once."

"What did I say?" She joined her hands with an effect of wringing them. "Did I say I loved you?"

He put his happy face near hers: "No, icicle. But you said you'd marry me. I shall melt you afterwards —or I'll break you into little shining bits." He had taken her by her slender wrists and was drawing her to him.

Voices on the landing above. . . . She slid out of his hold, backed into the tapestry room and shut a noiseless door between them.

CHAPTER VII

WHEN he entered Camilla's box in the *entr'acte* it seemed to be as full already as it could hold. She gave him her eyes over irrelevant shoulders, and he was content to wait. His reward was to hear her, in the face of much persuasion, refuse to keep what she declared was only a semi-promise to "go on" to a supper party. They convicted her of caprice; they bantered; an eager young woman positively bullied.

"Do you not know," said a foreign gentleman, with a Tartar or even Kalmuck cast of face, "do you not know that when Mrs. Trenholme looks like that—it is hopeless?"

"If she had any reason!" complained the young woman in the "all-round" tiara, rows of gems round her neck and diamond brooches stuck at random over the front of her bodice. The ill-natured had been known to say that Mrs. Trenholme recognized how good a foil for her simplicity was Judith Kinglake's barbaric splendour.

Nancarrow's eyes went from box to box and then back to Camilla. The truth was she had the knack of making most women look overdressed. As two of the men at the back passed out into the foyer, others crowded in. All the occupants of the box were standing, greeting acquaintances, praising or objurgating the performers, laughing, buzzing, making their contribution to the sum of sound that welled up from the full house. Over all, Judith Kinglake's tiara, and her diamond-hard voice: "You might at least invent some excuse. At three o'clock you were quite pleased with my plan of coming back for supper. The question is, what's happened since three o'clock?"

Nancarrow at last had made his way to Camilla's hand.

"If they don't let you alone," he threatened, smiling, "I'll tell them."

"Tell them what?" she returned a little startled.

"Tell them what's happened since three o'clock."

Camilla sat down in her corner again and opened the case of her opera glass. The foreigner with the flat nose and high cheek bones bent down to whisper something. He seemed not to be thinking of what he was saying, but of what he was looking at. Out of a swathe of black gauze Camilla's shoulders rose white as ocean foam against the darkness of storm-gathered sea-weed. Slowly the Russian's heavy eyes crawled over her.

"There is a draught with that door open," Nancarrow said. "Won't you have your cloak?" . . . without waiting for her opinion or consent; "I beg your pardon," he said to the other man. Before Prince Shubaloff realized what base advantage was to be taken of his politeness in giving way for a moment, the vision was wrapped from his sight in an ermine cloak. Having accomplished this with notable dispatch Nancarrow drew the chair, which the Russian had marked for his own, close to the lady's side and established himself in it.

The two leaned over the front of the box, and looked at the scene below.

"Who is this fellow?" Michael whispered.

"A friend of Alice's. From the Russian Embassy."

"Well, I wish he'd go back there."

The tone was so unlike Nancarrow's that she asked in a whisper what was the matter.

"I'll tell you going home."

"Going home?"

"Yes, I suppose you know I'm going home with you."

"It will be very late—"

He met her odd dubious look, smiling. "Not too late for the rest of the party to go to supper."

"There won't be any supper at home."

"Oh, well I can do without *supper,*" he laughed.

Her eyes fell from his face.

The lights went down, the first notes came up from the orchestra.

He resigned his seat and made his way out, wondering.

Two hours later she stood beside him at the windy entrance just inside the colonnade. The footmen pressed in on the fringes of the crowd, craning, holding up a hand to attract attention. Messengers in wet Mackintoshes crowded about the Commissionaires; numbers were called, and cars full or empty were briskly dismissed to make way for others.

In the glare of electric light Camilla's dark head rose out of her ermine coat with a distinction due partly to the fact that she, alone among the clustered women, wore no veil or scarf. Yet the wind spared her. No wisps of hair blew out. On her part none of the general clutching at flapping wraps and flying laces. Her clean outlines more than ever reminded Nancarrow of a head among the Pisanello coins he and she had lingered to look at that first night in the Santefedes' *salon de réception.*

"Here comes ours!"

When he turned on the curb to hand her in he saw to his surprise that she had some one with her. A middle-aged woman, very stout; above the shining red face a wind-blown wreath, and below it a double chin.

Mrs. Trenholme gave the footman an address that wasn't her own. As the door slammed: "We can drop Mrs. Blake—Mr. Nancarrow," she threw in the introduction.

Mrs. Blake's gratitude and the reasons why her motor wasn't available filled the early part of the drive. The voice beat on Nancarrow's ears like a solo continuation of the chatter and the shouting of the lobbies. The interloper's redundant proportions filling the car, prolonged the sense of crowding. He left off inwardly cursing, and fell to thanking God when the fat lady stepped out in the rain at her own door.

As he sank into the seat beside Camilla, "Now why in Heaven's name did you do that, most unaccountable of women?" And then he smiled triumphantly at the large admission wrung by silence. Under the ermine cloak his hand found a way to hers. The chill of it struck through her thin suède glove. "How cold!" he brought it to his lips.

"Oh, colder still, if my coat isn't held tight." She drew her hand back and his followed after. The arm he had slipped under her elbow lay at her side. It was as if he had come close to some wild thing caught in a sudden captivity. The violence of that heart-beating made his own heart leap.

Cold manner. Icy hand. And a heart going like this!

He sat thrilled in the darkness.

The murkiness without, moonless and uniform, was broken by the flaring approach and quick eclipse of motor lamps, and by the shine of street lights dropping long-drawn reflections on the wet asphalt, pennons of brightness tapering to dusk. Glimpses of the few wind-buffeted pedestrians gave an added sense of the comfort of shelter, not alone that of ermine cloaks. It sent the mind on to a re-valuation of the fireside.

"The car can take you home."

He thanked her absently. But it would be too late he said.

"Not at all"—that old formality came back into her voice as she sat up and grasped her cloak tighter in freed hands. He saw they were slowing in front of Mrs. Trenholme's door. "It can't be much after half-past eleven," she added.

"You aren't meaning you don't want me to come in!" he was too incredulous to be hurt.

"Tomorrow, any time tomorrow."

Something in her voice reminded him of Alice's warning. "Don't frighten her. She's very American." A warning which at the time had perplexed and even an-

noyed him. He wished now he hadn't so abruptly closed the conversation. What had Alice meant? Why should there be any pitfalls in dealing with a normal person, however desperately American? After all, he reflected, so far as there was anything in what Alice had said, it was no doubt a reference to the code by which your young American may, light-heartedly enough, defy convention by living alone and yet be far more circumspect in so doing than many a woman with belongings about. Other intimations, vague but coercive, came back to him.

"Very well, *cara mia.*"

His quiet acceptance left her battling, not as she had expected, with him, but with her own disappointment.

She started as the footman appeared at the door of the motor: "You haven't rung?—that's right." The footman opened an umbrella. It was all he could do to hold it against the wind. On the other side of the lady, Nancarrow on the step waited to unlock the house door. She was still clutching her cloak with one hand. With the other she felt under the folds for the chain that carried the latch-key.

"I can't *think,*" she vented her nervousness, "why anybody, who doesn't have to, ever goes out on a blustering night like this. You mustn't wait there in the rain."

"Oh, the rain," he laughed. "We English grumble. But other people take it more to heart."

As if to punish him a gust of wind seized his tall hat and nearly got away with it.

"I'm not usually as stupid as this," she apologized, still fumbling.

The wind seemed to know that in her excitement upon finding herself coming out of Covent Garden with the man she had fled from two days before, she had not stopped to do up the somewhat complicated fastening of her coat. She had merely held it wrapped round her till she needed her hands to disentangle the key from loops and cords and laces.

"In another minute I shall break this miserable chain," she said, and then—"No, I'll ring." It was for that the wind waited. As Camilla lifted her hand to the bell the coat blew open. It went flaring and bellying out behind its wearer as though satin-lined ermine were a bit of storm-beaten sail. With both hands Nancarrow caught at it.

"Oh, the gentleman's hat!" she called out in French. "Quick, François!" The chauffeur leapt out from behind his steering-wheel and went careering down the street after a black object that rolled and bumped, skipped and collided, and rolled on again.

An electric light sprang up in the vestibule. The door stood open.

Nancarrow shading his eyes and looking down the street was trying to follow the chase. But the chauffeur had disappeared as completely as the hat.

"Come in a moment, and let Henry shut the door." She shivered as she slipped her coat off into the servant's hands, and explained what had happened—"When it comes bring it in here."

Nancarrow followed her into the room she had shut him out of a few hours before. She bent over the fire, hands to the blaze. "Ugh! the damp goes down into the marrow. Bring up a chair."

As he obeyed her he took note of the small reading table on the other side of the hearth. Under a shaded lamp sat the letters of the last post, in a pile, on top of the evening papers. On the other side of the lamp, a solitary glass of milk.

"Is that your supper?"

At his whimsical smile she looked away (caught drinking milk like a baby!)

The footman entered and presented an object with a highly apologetic air. The object was wet, it was muddy, it was bent, it was dented.

Nancarrow leaned back in a fit of helpless laughter at

the contrast between the gravity of the footman and rakish low-comedy aspect of the hat. "Dan Leno would give his eyes for it," he said, as he held out his hand.

"You *can't!*" she protested, grave as the servant—"not till it's been dried, anyway."

The footman hesitated. "I *'ave* wiped it'm. We 'avn't got any fire that's 'ot except this."

"Put it down here then. Wait. A newspaper." While she opened the *Westminster* and spread it over the low fender—"Bring a chafing dish," she went on, speaking rather fast for her; "I'll do a Bombay duck—or cheese fondu if there isn't anything else! Very gingerly, with the aid of a second paper, she propped the hat on the fender.

A folding table was brought in and opened out opposite the absurd hat. It sat cocked against the fender with an air of laughing at them. Camilla eyed it uneasily.

She began to talk about the tenor, an unusual brightness in her eyes and a slight breathlessness in her commonly quiet speech. "No, I'll light the spirit lamp," she interjected as the servant after putting down a large tray, stood hesitating. Her eyes surveyed the table for any lack. "Oh! what shall we drink?" she asked her guest.

"Well, not milk," he answered firmly.

"As if I expected you to!" She ordered a bottle of Château Yquem: "And where is the bread?"

"Bread'm?"

"Yes, bread." She turned her head. "You wouldn't be happy I suppose unless you had toast."

"Oh, I'll be happy," Nancarrow assured her, "quite happy, watching you over your witches' brew." He had seen these chafing-dish rites performed more than once in this house. They still had for him not only an extraordinary fascination but an effect of magic. She had risen as the servant left the room and stood a moment

surveying the expanse of silver tray that glimmered like a pool of water. It bore for its most noteworthy object a high central vessel. All round this conning tower were ranged a fleet of tiny dishes like little canoes, or Irish corracles, in the service of the greater vessel. The woman's approach changed the image to one of more homely association as she bent to play her tune of delicate hospitality among faintly clinking glass and chiming silver. A spoonful of this, two drops of that, a cup of cream—

"What is it going to be?" he asked watching her fingers.

"As if I'd tell you."

"It's awful," remarked the guest—"the hunger these preparations produce."

"Are you really hungry, or just pretending?"

"Try me?"

The footman came back with the wine cpened, and a loaf of bread.

"That's all, you needn't wait."

Astonishment rendered Henry denser than common. He hung there.

"I shall not want anything more," said the lady.

"Oh, very well 'm. But . . . er . . . the 'at 'm—?"

"We—Mr. Nancarrow will attend to the hat. Leave a brush on the hall table."

Henry vanished.

"You'll have to be rewarded for this!"

Michael should not have said it. Instinctively Camilla turned away from his too agitating neighbourhood and laid hands upon the homely staff of life. She cut two slices of bread and brought them on a plate to the fire. In the other hand she held something shining. This, as she pulled out the three telescoped lengths, was revealed as a toasting-fork. She impaled a slice of bread and knelt down before the fire on the far side of the battered hat. It sat between her and Michael, cocking a

knowing eye at him as though they two were in league.

"There's an electric arrangement that does toasting, but I don't know where it is."

Michael sat looking at her over the hand that stroked his moustache. "I know the thing you mean. A poor invention."

"You think so?"

"No opinion of it at all—as compared to this." He leaned over the better to see her face in the firelight. Not so much the steadiness, the intimacy of his look, made the hand that held the toasting-fork tremble slightly. "You are adorable when you blush," he said very low. "I never saw you do it before—"

"If you were straight in front of that fire, you'd blush too," she said, as he bent nearer. "Here try it—Englishmen are dreadfully lazy." Across the absurd hat she handed him the toasting-fork. Nancarrow didn't take it instantly. He and the hat laughed at the flushed Camilla. Then Michael put his hand over hers. But her fingers slipped out and left him with the fork.

Now she was lighting a blue flame under the stand that bore the high dish. She stood there measuring, stirring.

Nancarrow and the devil-may-care hat sat smiling by the fire. The moments went by. The chill of the raw night was gone out of the man's blood. The chill of Camilla's dismissal was gone from his heart. A sense of exquisite well-being visited him. A deepening faith that all was well. When presently he glanced over his shoulder, he surprised her looking at him. A look that but for Alice's warning would have carried him hot-foot across the room. "You make me wonder," his voice was misleadingly quiet, "whether other people could say so much without words if they gave themselves a chance. Is it lack of faith that throws them back on chatter?"

"You want to console me for having no small talk?"

He lounged over to the table holding out the toast:

"It wouldn't be fair if you had small talk as well as your range of silence."

She detached the toast. "Quite nice." She offered the fork again. "Now go and do another, please." Instead of taking the fork, he took the hand that lay on the rim of the tray and carried it to his lips. Her fingers trembled under his ardour. He stilled their tremulousness between his palms, and he looked at her with the eyes of possession. Her own answered joy for joy before, under the weight of gladness, the lids went down.

"You didn't get my flowers," he said.

"Yes."

"But you didn't wear them?"

She drew her hand away and sat down. "Don't ever send me camellias, please."

"No?" He opened his eyes. "You haven't any idea of the trouble I took. And they didn't please you?"

"Not camellias. Anything but camellias," she spoke with an odd, soft vehemence.

"Oh-h!" he said reproachfully. "I've loved them, ever since I knew you. They've always reminded me of—"

"*Don't!*" she exclaimed.

"I was only going to say they make me think of your face."

"I knew that's what you meant. But you must never say it." As she lifted her eyes she drew away as far as the great chair would let her. The motion was plainly instinctive. But it had all that effect of over-emphasis that attends expressiveness on the part of the naturally unpictorial.

Nancarrow laughed. "I didn't know you were so vain." She stared. "But isn't it *like* life." (He slipped into the chair beside her.) "Here are you with your glorious tints of cream and russet, and yet you go envying the everlasting roses and lilies—"

"It's not that at all."

"What then—what's wrong—?"

"It's *been said,*" she answered very low. "I don't like the things that have been said."

"You mean it reminds you—"

"Yes," she interposed.

The look he bent on her of worshipping tenderness darkened before the thought of all the grieving, all she must have gone through to create such shrinking. "What happened after I left Florida?"

"It was happening," she said slowly, "while you were there."

"Oh—"

"I expect you knew." She waited. He made no sign. "Everybody knew," she went on, "except me. The only thing that happened after was that, at last, even I—"

There was no anger in her low voice but very surely a sound of unshed tears. A great gentleness was in Nancarrow's face as he said: "Did it come as—was it a very great—"

She got up, abandoned the blue flame and went towards the crackling logs. She stood with her back to Nancarrow as she said: "I don't think we need . . . I don't feel as if I wanted to—or as if I ought to talk about those times. You won't mind if I can't bear to talk about—all that?"

"No, dearest of all the world"—he said in that reassuring voice of his, and he was at her side—"I don't want to talk about anything under God's heaven tonight, except you and me—"

"Tonight?" she echoed and still she stood there with eyes that looked back across the Atlantic. "I will always tell you anything you need to—or *want* to know. But I don't feel"—she hesitated—"as if I ought ever to discuss Leroy—not intimately—with anybody. Will you mind that?"

"Mind it? I have to prod myself into believing he ever existed."

"*Don't* then"—with an odd solemnity she gave him back her hands. The compact was sealed. Now she was free to think of other things. She uttered a little exclamation and ran swiftly to the table as if to save the supper from burning—or was it to save herself?

She stood stirring the compound which the discreet blue flame had warmed to bubbling savouriness, and she nodded towards the second piece of bread. "I must have toast, too."

"Well, rather!" He speared up the slice but his eyes were with Camilla—Camilla lifting a glass bowl and holding back raw oysters with a strainer, pouring the liquor off into the steaming dish and achieving the homely act with a concentration that would seem to say: "This is the important thing. Lesser matters must wait."

Nancarrow, humouring the view, asked over his shoulder if the oysters didn't go in too?

"Not yet. They'd be tough." She slid a look at him —"Mustn't watch me."

"Look here! if I can't even watch you—"

"Watch the toast—it's burning."

He repudiated the injustice; but he hastily turned the slice.

Camilla sat down. Elbows on table, chin on folded hands, listening to the simmer, watching the slight shake and lift of the silver cover. It was as if the traditional occupation had tranquillized her. Now she had taken off the cover and poured the oysters into the creaming broth. "Come," she said with a housewifely air, "supper's ready."

The oysters were little more than piping hot, not cooked you understand, when she ladled the compound into bowls. "Eat it while it smokes," she recommended. When she had blown out the flame at the end of a silver

trumpet she offered him a box with a single half-defiant word: "Crackers."

He laughed and held them in his hand till he saw her drop hers in her steaming bowl. The crackers floated about, half submerged, like little golden-brown submarines. And they broke crisply under the teeth—oh, a very glorified form of oyster stew.

"Best food I ever tasted," he said.

She smiled when he demanded more, revelling in that pleasure which the woman far more sophisticated than Camilla Trenholme still feels in feeding a hungry man. Especially *the* hungry man.

"Do you really want more? How nice of you." She smiled as she ladled it out. "Is that enough?"

"I shouldn't think so."

She laughed quite out loud. "You are like a great hungry schoolboy."

She refilled his glass.

"Why did you never show us this room when Alice and I were here?"

"I never bring anybody here."

He had no idea, he said, that she was so selfish. "I admit there is a very special atmosphere about it. I can't believe sitting here—that it's a wild, black, pelting night outside, can you?"

"That was just what I used to feel at Nancarrow," she said dreamily. "I forgot the storms outside."

"Doesn't that *show*—" he broke off.

She raised her eyes.

"I don't see how you could do it—go away like that!" She pushed the cigarette box towards him.

"However I look at it—and I've looked at it steadily all those horrible sleepless hours—"

He lit a match and watched it burn till the flame seemed to touch his fingers. Then he dropped it in his saucer.

"Didn't you realize what you were doing to me?"

"A little sharp suffering—if it was sharp."

At the sudden raising of his eyes—"Forgive me," she said. "But a few days of it—that's better than a long battle." The shadows had settled on her face.

"What do you mean? There wasn't—there isn't going to be any long battle."

"If I hadn't gone away there would have been. Your mother—" she faltered.

"Well, what about my mother?"

"Either you'd have to go away from Nancarrow—and that's unthinkable—or . . . your mother would go."

He looked at her with a moment's wondering tenderness. "You had hoped she wouldn't?" Then he brushed it aside. "All that will arrange itself. I don't pretend that I think about that at all. All I think about is that you are more to me than anybody alive. It was never the least use your talking about going out of my life by leaving Nancarrow. There's only one way you can go out of my life." He leaned nearer. "Dearest—dearest—" she seemed to sink deeper into the depths of the great chair. Nerves less responsive than Michael's would have failed to interpret that slight stirring of the figure. His quick country-bred eye had seen the nested bird make that faint settling movement before flight. Again Alice's warning came into his mind. "Go slow . . . if you frighten her, you're done." He smiled now at the idea, but all the same he sat quite still. "It isn't your beauty only," he said in his low controlled voice. "It isn't only your gentleness. I don't honestly know which I love most—your body or your soul. But now that I've found you, I could no more give you up and go on with life than I could give up half my body and go on with life." He bent to her again trying to make her meet his eyes. "That doesn't surprise you, does it?" She made no sign. He leant across the arm of her chair. "*I* saw what it meant," he triumphed, "before we got back to England, didn't you? Come, confess."

"I—wasn't sure."

"Not sure!" He dropped from the uncharted uplands of woman's outlook to the sure level of his man's faith. "You are the only person I've ever known that I didn't want to hide myself from. I felt disturbed enough when I found I wasn't succeeding in hiding from you. You came into all the secretest places. And then I saw it was your right. You belonged there. *You* felt that—"

"I'm not listening to the sense—if it *is* sense." She smiled dreamily out of heavy-lidded eyes. "I'm only listening to the sound. I never heard a sound so beautiful."

He smiled too, in a detached way at the ceiling as he settled his head against the back of her chair. He stretched out his long limbs. In the same even tone he went on: "Your mind was at home with me, just as my body is at home here. And yours is at home at Nancarrow. Then I saw that what I thought was life had been half a life. I didn't even know I'd been lonely—till I knew you. Loneliness? the ache of incompleteness that I thought was part of living—I found it was all gone the moment I was alone with you." He turned a little and his lips brushed a tendril of her hair.

She linked her fingers and stood up very straight—not hurriedly or nervously but with a kind of solemnity, like one who has remembered something of huge, of overshadowing significance—almost as if the remembered something were nothing less than the Wonder of Life, a sudden envisagement of that mystery of individual Fate, on which the world's History turns. But no word of any such matter. Only, "How quiet the house is!" and then with lifted eyes, "I should think so! Look at the clock."

He didn't look at the clock—didn't move. He had no need to remind her: "You and I, the only ones awake in all this soundless house! We've never been 'alone' to this extent before." He raised his head to find her eyes,

not on the clock—on him. A look that brought him to his feet. He checked himself with, Steady! That echo of Alice's penny whistle, shrill to the inner ear, sounded through all these surging harmonies—the Hymn of Life played by the Master Musician upon thrilling pulses.

She, too, seemed determined to break the spell. The interlaced fingers were drawn chest high and pressed there as if to force out unwilling words:

"It may be true what you've been saying. If we were both Americans it might do—just to think only of you and me. But by-and-by you'll be thinking about those others. The only difference between us is. . . . I think of them now."

Well she had done it! The penny tune had stilled the greater music, and whistled them home from the clouds. Their feet were planted firm upon the earth again. "Suppose," he said, "suppose I promise that until you want me to, I won't give up Nancarrow, nor let my mother. Will that content you?"

She answered provokingly, irrelevantly, that it would be "terrible to bring unhappiness there"—and she must say good night.

Down out of the clouds? They were flat on their faces. "You can hardly suppose," he said, with a touch of bitterness, "that you know what would make me happy better than I do!" At Camilla's movement towards the door the sudden flash in him went out as quickly as it flamed. Standing there in the middle of the room he held out a hand. "Oh, be kind to me, Camilla!"

"Kind to you?"

He saw she was trembling as she half turned to face him. Still he stood there—as firm as one of his own young oaks, never expecting the quick reward that met his hard-won mastery. For the most undemonstrative of women came back, came closer, lifted her face and kissed him on the mouth. He caught her to him and she closed her eyes with head fallen backward in a faintness of rap-

ture. The unconquerable impulse which had carried her off her feet, was for him sheer miracle.

"Again! again!" he whispered, as he brought her face against his. The slim body felt like a child's in his arms, till that sense vanished, too, in the headlong feeling of being fused in a common fire.

"Again! Again! kiss me like that again!"

Whether at the hot words, or some half-unconscious movement on his part, or the flame in her touched by some alien breath—it went out and left a shivering behind.

Suddenly, almost violently, she freed herself. She stood there with a look of fright on her face, the mouth he had kissed to scarlet, quivering. "Go, please," she said.

There was something about her that gave Nancarrow the oddest feeling of never having seen her before. "If you don't go now—*this moment*—" she caught her breath—"I . . . I'll never forgive myself for bringing you here tonight."

"What is it—what's the matter?" he said bewildered. As she didn't answer, "You are loving me, Camilla—?"

"I'll love you when you are gone." As he passed, he bent to kiss her hands. With an action that struck him as childish she put her hands behind her. He smiled and went out into the hall.

Would she come after him? No sound.

Not till he opened the front door and faced the windy dark did he remember he had left his hat by the fire. He turned to go back, and changed his mind. He went out bare-headed and shut the door behind him with a bang that stirred the echoes. A moment he stood on the step, waiting, listening. Then the message he stayed for seemed by some wireless way to reach him. Smiling all to himself he walked up the street.

CHAPTER VIII

CAMILLA spent the following day with her sister, lunching with her at the Ritz, looking about in "dear little Bond Street," as Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley called it, for "the few things you can't get so good in Paris." These appeared to be chiefly travellers' accessories. When they had chosen a new dressing-bag, a recently invented wardrobe trunk, and a fur rug for the imminent Atlantic crossing, the sisters relaxed over tea at Rumpelmeyer's.

They were to dine at Queen Anne's Gate, and Michael was to be there, on the express understanding that nothing should be said, just yet, to point the fact that he was more than any other friend.

Michael didn't like the condition. "Why don't you tell your sister?"

"Because"—Camilla smiled—"I don't believe it myself."

"There's a cure for that," he said; "it grows at Nancarrow."

Michael did his best that night at dinner, but when he had gone, Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley, big and handsome and smiling, went over to her sister and kissed her. "I'm *so* glad, my dear! He is charming."

Camilla had the grace to flush a little. "Oh, you're always . . . thinking things—!"

She wouldn't "talk comfortably" about Mr. Nancarrow, and still she seemed to cling to the elder sister as she had not now for years. "Send for your things. Stay here till you sail."

Was it worth while only for two days? Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley had arranged to sleep in Liverpool the night before going on board.

"Two days is better than nothing," Camilla said.

"Better for what? Better than leaving the coast clear for that delightful man?"

But Camilla had her way. A message telephoned to the Ritz brought the longsuffering Swiss maid with an instalment of the Plumstead-Atherley luggage to Queen Anne's Gate that night. And there for the remaining forty-odd hours of her flying visit the lady stayed, with frequent but, from her point of view, insufficient glimpses of the delightful man. She was so unlucky as to miss most of his brief visit the morning after her arrival.

The two sisters were going out after breakfast; Camilla, dressed for walking, sat at her writing-table dealing with the morning's letters, while she waited. She knew of old that Julia would take longer to put on a hat and veil than any known woman—Camilla would have been the first to add that few would be found to have put them on so well.

The door of the tapestry room opened, and Nancarrow was shown in.

"I had to come. I've heard from my mother."

"So soon!" Camilla's heart shrank. He laid a telegram down before her. Over and over she read it, too incredulous at first to rejoice. But what had happened? "Why does she like it now when she hated it two days ago?"

"She never hated it—not really. She liked you from the first. Look here, this is what I'm answering: *'Very happy over your message. Bringing Camilla tomorrow. Love from Michael.'*"

She drew a shaking pencil through "tomorrow" and wrote "soon." He put in "very."

"Must we go?" she asked wistfully.

"I shan't ask you to stay, if you don't like. But you did," he said gently, "seem to like Nancarrow."

"Indeed and indeed!" But she pleaded for "a little while to grow accustomed. Everything seems so different."

He laughed happily at her breathlessness.

"Well, look!" She showed letters from Alice, from Mrs. George, from Blanche, actually one from Tony. "Diana's isn't finished. She's writing you a book," was Tony's postscript. Even the younger children had sent a round-robin. Jim wrote: "We are hopping you will like us and not forget the Krokkerdile you promissed to flote in the bath." "Aren't they wonderful?"

"Not at all." Michael handed them back, looking perfectly delighted. "Only what was to be expected."

The next morning brought Mrs. Nancarrow's letter to Queen Anne's Gate. Dignified, brief, but adequate—welcoming Camilla as a daughter. It was very perplexing.

By dint of a newly conceived necessity to go to Liverpool to see her sister off to America, the return to Nancarrow was postponed. But only a day. For the delightful man came to Liverpool too and assisted in the seeing off. After which he carried Camilla on to Cumberland.

In spite of that astonishing telegram from Mrs. Nancarrow and the almost equally astonishing letters from the rest of the family, Camilla would have faced her return with an anguish of uncertainty—but for the look in Michael's eyes. Could such a man wear such a look unless all were well? Each time her spirit fell it was upborne on the strong wings of Michael's confidence, his shining joy.

Certainly, from the beginning it was far easier than she could have dreamed. They know how to do these things, she said to herself, feeling that these people had found the exact mean between formality and effusiveness. As she and Michael drove up, the great iron-studded doors opened and the butler gave way to his mistress. Mrs. Nancarrow, in her rough-hewn dignity, stood there with Alice at her back. Michael jumped out and kissed his mother. No speech, just the eloquence of his quick

turn and the touch of his hand on Camilla's arm, giving her to his mother's grave embrace. "My dear!" was all she said, but Camilla had no feeling that it was not enough. Alice, who had come back the day before, fell upon her with hugging and laughter and gay words, and all the hall behind those two at the door was full of Nancarrows, big and little, smiling and holding out hands and lifting bright country cheeks to be kissed.

"She's tired," Michael said, "and cold. She must have tea upstairs and rest till dinner."

It was like another world. Camilla sighed happily as she lay down on the sofa drawn in front of the bedroom fire.

. . . . . .

"Well?" he said, standing and looking down at her that night after dinner. He and Tony and Mr. Croft had sat at the table only a few minutes after the ladies went in to the drawing-room. When he and Tony came in, Michael found Camilla in a little chair at his mother's side, with the girls in a group around them. He stopped for a moment in front of Alice and Mrs. George, who were exchanging confidences by the fire, and then went to take his mother's coffee cup.

"Come and talk to me," he said to Camilla as he passed. He carried her over to the little sofa under the Hoppner ancestress. "Well?"

"It's like a dream. Do they really mean it—do you think?"

"Mean what, my darling?"

"All this . . . kindness and warmth."

He laughed. "Of course they mean it, Unbeliever!" Then that low delicious music, "How could they help loving you?" He slipped into the place by her side. But only for a moment. He called out to "the worst behaved of my nieces," and made the chaff and laughter general.

It struck Camilla with curious force that, even on this

first evening at home, Michael should regard himself as belonging to the family rather than to his betrothed alone. She found the English way less embarrassing than the American. It left without undue emphasis the engaged state. An American, in Michael's place, would have carried the lady off to the library or hall and been astonished, not to say injured, at any intrusion on their privacy.

Michael did not even seem to think his mother's evening game of bridge need be intermitted. They sat down to a rubber. Mrs. Nancarrow already knew that Camilla was no great adept. But this was the first time she pointed out errors of judgment—"treating me just as she does Alice!" was Camilla's inward comment. She received the instruction with meekness.

Mrs. Nancarrow unbent. "If you *cared* about it, you'd play a quite good game."

"Must I care?" Camilla asked, smiling.

"It isn't a bad plan to do a thing well that you are called on to do often."

Camilla felt that she was being taken in hand. She resolved to send for a book on Bridge. She would astonish this old lady with her proficiency.

During dinner Camilla had broken the slender chain she was wearing. Tony only now noticed the two ends hanging loose.

"Let me mend it for you. Mayn't I?"

"Will you?"

"I'd *love* to."

"But *can* you?"

"You'll soon see." He carried the chain off to find some pincers.

At the end of the short evening: "Did you like my flowers?" Blanche asked after a little scuffle over who should have the lighting of Camilla's candle. "They were out of *my* garden."

"You need not get up to breakfast if you are tired in

the morning." Mrs. Nancarrow's brood exchanged sly glances at an indulgence without precedent. Camilla made her thanks, but she would prefer to come down. She was kissed at the foot of the stairs, shook Michael's hand over the banister, and went up with a long tail of young people to see her to her room. Alice came running after, and drove them out. "I'm not going to stay but two seconds; Michael is very firm about it."

If the rest of the family gave her warmth, Alice gave her light. "They've always liked you. Mother's done her duty in registering a protest against the only thing there ever was against you. Having done that, she's free now to—"

"To what?"

"Why, to think only about Michael's happiness."

"I'm exactly what I was last week."

"That's where you're clean off the track," said Alice, with her schoolboy emphasis. "You're a totally different person." She met Camilla's lifted eyes with "You're one of us now." She put her arms about her friend and kissed her, with an emotion unusual with Alice. Then she flicked her handkerchief across her blue eyes and recovered her jauntiness. "I wouldn't be too set up about it if I were you," she said wickedly; "they'd be nice to a black if Michael insisted on marrying one."

All the same, very soothing, more than a little intoxicating, this magical change in people. It extended far beyond the borders of Nancarrow.

Those five lines in the *Morning Post* had transformed the face of the world:

> An engagement is announced between Michael Everard Nancarrow, second son of the late Col. George Howard Nancarrow, K.C.S.I., K.C.M.G., and of Mrs. Nancarrow of Nancarrow, to Mrs. Leroy Hunter Trenholme of New York.

Other papers made more of it. *The Tatler* published photographs of the contracting parties, views of Nancarrow Hall, and of Michael Nancarrow at the meet. *Country Life* had pictures of both, and a fresh series of Nancarrow views. The frontispiece was a full-page enlargement of a snapshot showing Mrs. Leroy Trenholme in a boat on a lake. This was handed round, to Camilla's discomfiture, one afternoon after tea. Mrs. Nancarrow glanced at the page and put the paper down. "You could have given them a better picture than that," she said, "if you wanted a private photograph to appear in the public prints."

"But I didn't 'want';" Camilla stopped, a little daunted by the look on the old woman's face. For Mrs. Nancarrow had risen as though effectually to dismiss a distasteful topic.

"You don't think *she* gave this to the paper?" Michael said.

"How did they get it then?"

"I have no idea," Camilla assured her. "You mustn't, please, think I give my picture to newspapers."

"Oh, really? I understood that Americans look at these things differently." She broke off still with that air of offended taste, and went into the garden with Nellie and the children.

Michael's eyes were on Alice. He leaned forward. "You gave them that picture," he said in a low voice.

"What makes you think so?" his sister laughed.

"It is one of the snapshots you took at Lugano."

"Clever boy! It is. I gave it to Bobby Deering. They've only taken the poor lamb on trial, and he's afraid they won't keep him."

Michael's face was hard as flint as he retorted: "Well, don't in future help him at Camilla's expense." He swung out of the room with long strides that quickly caught up his mother. When he came back Camilla was alone.

"A penny—!"

She raised her head. "I am sorry your mother thought—"

"She *doesn't* think. I've taken care she doesn't."

At such a time she had only to be five minutes with Michael to recover her new happiness.

There was something heavenly comforting as well as stimulating about the Michael of these days.

He gave her a sense of magical safety, of the shelter of thick walls like those of his ancestral home. A power to commandeer kindness, dignity; a power to shut out the carping, sour-faced world.

She repeated to herself: "A magical safety!"

As against the remembered accents, thinner, sharper, of her own countrymen, Michael's rich tones soothed her like a lullaby. "You remember the woman who took you sleighing in New York?—that beautiful Pansy Dillon, who flirted with you so outrageously? Do you remember her saying she was always warm in the coldest weather when she was with you?—and how they all laughed because you got red? and how relieved you were when she said she guessed it was your voice—it always made her think of sitting safe under a buffalo robe?"

Just that. You were safe, you were warm, within the sound of Michael's voice.

She loved his smiling nonchalance. You would never shake Michael out of his self-possession. Nor, she felt instinctively, out of his loyalty.

Safe. Safe.

After the shower of telegrams, letters; and, after the letters, the wedding gifts came pouring in, forwarded from Queen Anne's Gate.

"I had no idea you had so many friends," Michael laughed.

"Neither had I," said Camilla.

In a thousand subtle ways, during the days that followed, she was made to feel the difference between being

the unsponsored stranger, object of curiosity and exploitation, neither maid, wife nor widow, and being the affianced bride of one of the Nancarrows of Nancarrow.

The heart of her gratitude was the prayer that she might be worthy of Michael.

"If only I was cleverer," she said to him. "Don't expect me to understand of myself. You'll have to show me . . . to explain all sorts of things."

She wasn't to bother her head, he said. "You'll see, it will all come quite naturally."

But she was less enlightened than bewildered by matters that were commonplace to him. His sitting-room was an example. In spite of the sporting prints, the prize cups and light literature, the place seemed to her more like a comfortable, rather cluttered office, with its great writing-table, the safe, the estate and county maps on the walls, the ledgers and account-books. "Felton Castle Estate," she read on one of the japanned deed boxes. Yes, he was administrator of more than one estate. He was guardian for an orphan cousin. Camilla went reading the labels on drawers and over pigeon-holes.

It was not unnatural to discover that he was member of every sort of sports committee. But he was also Justice of the Peace! Michael! She laughed at that, he couldn't think why. "Politician too!" She stood in front of the drawer bearing for its label the name of the Parliamentary Division.

"Very little of a politician," he assured her; but he had to "hold up our end in the county."

He managed to do that, she gathered, in spite of refusing to stand for Parliament, or to hold any prominent official position. Oh, perhaps he chose the men who did these things? Well, that was more or less part of the Nancarrow job. What he really cared about was the land. He'd go out of his way to promote the agricultural interests, not of the Nancarrow farms merely, but

of the district. He appeared to do his promoting partly by means of meetings, partly by keeping a sort of informal bureau of information—by correspondence as well as by example. . . . What didn't this gentleman of leisure do!

She had said after her first perplexed glance round: "Any one would think you were a business man!"

"Well, I suppose, in a sort of a way, I *am* a man of business. I ought to be."

"But you never *look* busy."

Never driven. No, he drove.

"It does bewilder me—all this."

"Why should it? Your father, your men in general in America—"

"Yes, they do these things, I suppose." She was thinking it out. "They do some of these things and I dare say some others, but—" She puckered her brows in an effort to get the matter clear. "They don't do them under our eyes. They don't do them at home. *That's* it! In America a man who has all this business would have an office—or a whole building full of offices." Her gravity gave way to smiling as she looked round. "You call the place you do your work in, your sitting-room. And it *is* a sitting-room. Your 'offices,'" she smiled again, in that sudden way, like a tickled child, "your mother's been showing me what you call 'offices' over here. Kitchen, scullery, the servants' hall, the still-room (I *adore* the still-room!) and all *that's* 'offices.' Oh, it's all mighty strange!—and you expect me to get the hang of it in a week?"

"No, no! Hang it all this minute—that's what I want." He stood in the midst of these reminders of a full and varied life, in his rough country tweed and immaculate linen, looking down at Camilla as though she were his one concern on earth. "It's a terrible long time since I had you a minute to myself."

"Sh! . . ." She drew away.

"Now, why do you do that?"

She listened. "I believe there's somebody in there!" She pointed to a door.

"Of course. Packard."

"Who is Packard?"

"My secretary. He won't dream of coming in, unless I call him."

But she had slipped out of his hold, and was walking about.

"That's how you do it! Where does he live—your Packard?"

"Live? In the cottage beyond the church. With his sister. She teaches in the school. Why did you want to know?"

"Only that it seems strange somehow that I didn't know—that I've never seen him—" She left it. "So this is where you come when you disappear for hours?"

"Only on certain days. To see the bailiff and sometimes a discontented tenant or two. Somebody has to do these things"—he half apologized. And again, as she seemed in her grave way to be trying to take it all in, he said she wasn't to bother her head. He overtook her at the window. Standing there in the morning sunshine with his arm about her, he told her that if she wanted to know her most immediate and pressing share in the affairs of Nancarrow, he would tell her.

Click! click! behind the door, the secretary's typewriter played its staccato accompaniment to Michael's confession: how glad it made him to see the way she got on with the family. He had known she would, but he hadn't been prepared for such a quick conquest of his mother. As a rule it took "a goodish while"—"but *you*, I can see," he triumphed, "you are going to be the daughter-in-law she cares most about."

"You'd like that?" Camilla turned a quick look up to his face. He bent to kiss her. She slipped out of his hold. "Packard!"

"Packard be hanged! I'll go and throw Packard out of the window if it'll make you any easier." Then, in that low voice that enveloped her like the sunshine, he talked about their plans. In this odd England it appeared you might be married by license or by certificate. If by license, one of them, according to Michael, would have to be resident for fifteen days preceding the marriage in the district where it's performed. If by certificate, each of them would have to live for seven days in the district."

Camilla listened with an eye on the door. Need they decide now?—couldn't they wait a little?

Why did she want to wait?

"Why, to . . . to understand all this, a little before—You can't *think* how different it is from anything I've known well." She looked at him with great gentleness. "Please. You mustn't hurry me, Michael dear."

When she called him "Michael dear" what wouldn't he do for her?

He longed to tell her that the mystification was not all her own. It was not only the definite fixing of the date for the wedding that she sheered away from. That might be only part of the traditional feminine attitude—though it surprised him to find the candid Camilla adopting it. Already Michael's mystification had deepened on occasion to a sense of injury. He had been more accustomed—oh, much more accustomed!—himself to do the evading of demonstrations of affection.

On Camilla's part, what did this shrinking from contacts mean? Was it, as Alice had once said, "American"? Alice had seen that he didn't understand her calling it that. "I don't deny," she explained, "that some of them are the merest animals. When they *are*, they are what they themselves call 'the limit.' But it's either that or the extreme of prudishness. Really a sort of bloodlessness. They haven't the balance of the English."

Camilla stood now, during the brief renewal of the wedding-day discussion, a figure exquisite, desirable, yet with that teasing suggestion of the elusive, saying: "Aren't you happy like this? *I* haven't been so happy for years."

"*Dear!* You are an angel to tell me that. I should be happy too—quite happy enough to go on 'like this,' as you say, for—well, for a few weeks—"

She laughed the happiest laugh he had heard from her.

"Yes, I could be happy enough to go on like this for a few weeks, if you—if you—" He came closer.

"Packard!" she ejaculated. The click, click had stopped.

"You know, you'll make me murder Packard!"

But the incentive to crime had fled out of the room.

After that, Michael would tell her in their none too frequent moments alone, that she wasn't to begin "Packardizing." His instinct was, as long as possible, to keep an essentially delicate subject in the safe region of the semi-humorous. He mustn't—as Camilla herself had warned him—he mustn't hurry her.

Apart from secret assurances of his own that helped him to patience, he had only to look at the supple, responsive body, the mouth, not full-lipped but curved for passion's uses, to feel, this was none of your bloodless women.

And always for crowning evidence he went back to that night in the tapestry room when she had kissed him first and set his senses in a flame. Her own, too. He could see her now with that look of compunction—you'd almost say of guilt—on her face, crying "Go!" If you don't go now, I shall be sorry I let you in." Whatever evidence she might later present, to the contrary, she would never convince Michael there wasn't fire somewhere under that mantle of snow. Once he burst out

with "Why are you so afraid to let yourself go? Do let yourself go!"

She pretended she didn't understand.

As to other matters of adaptation, though he had said to her in all good faith that she wasn't to bother her head, he was both amused and touched to find her taking, with that childlike seriousness, the matter of preparation for her part in the life there.

Alice declined to be the least touched. What Michael loved as a quality personal to Camilla was merely American. "I'm told you have classes to teach people how to make the kitchen fire, and you call it Domestic Economy. You have classes to teach you how to be a citizen. You call that Civics. And I hear you *teach* Patriotism in all your schools! You're a quaint people."

When they were alone Michael half jokingly apologized for Alice.

"Oh, I didn't mind *that!*"

"What do you mind, dearest?" His sudden seriousness at least equalled Camilla's own.

"It can't be helped," she said.

"But I'm sure it can!"

She shook her head. "I'm often thinking it these days—the pity it is I'm not cleverer. I never cared before!"

Michael's relief was immense and joyous. She was already far too clever for him! And the only thing that gave him courage was the adorable way her chin poked out. Yes, that, and the distracting little lovelock on the back of her neck. Might he . . . ? Oh! well, if he mightn't, then perhaps she'd just tell him one or two more of these things she found so "different" in England—things that needed all this "getting used."

She would smile and put him off with: "Oh! like the crime it is to keep people waiting—how you are all punctual to the minute and say 'parze' for 'parsse.' I mean

to learn to be punctual too, but I'd rather not leave out all the 'a's' in words that end in 'ary.'"

"Why should you?"

"Why should *you?*"

"But I don't."

"You and everybody here says 'Febru'ry,' 'solit'ry,' 'station'ry,' 'diction'ry,' 'milit'ry.'"

He was inclined to think they didn't leave out the vowel. They only slurred it. But the law in England was that anybody whose chin turned up at just the Camilla angle should say what she pleased. She wasn't to bother her—

"But I *must* bother! Why, even the children can't understand me when I tell them they must 'mind'!"

"Clever little monkeys!"

"No!" She shook a gloomy head. "They really didn't understand. Neither did Nelly. Are you sure you do?"

"Well, *rather!* You meant they were to pay attention, look sharp."

"Not at all. When we tell our children to 'mind,' we expect them to obey."

"So they shall, by George!"—he said with a prompt grin—"or I'll beat them black and blue."

Again she shook her head as much as to say not even beating "our children" would put matters right. "*Every*thing here surprises me," she brought out. "The things you lavish and the things you hoard—" She was evidently going on with a list, had he not jumped down her throat with:

"Hoard! What do we hoard?"

"Fruit," she answered promptly. "A cut melon. It will come back to the table at another meal!"

"Why not?"

"Oh! well, if you can't see—can't *taste* why . . . And Alice will say, 'Have a peach with me?' A piece of peach!"

With faintly twitching lips Michael considered. "Aren't ours bigger, perhaps?"

Oh! he was miles from understanding your true fruit-lover's capacity. "We girls at home used to sit two in a hammock. The peach tree as far as to that wall. Under it a wash-basket full of peaches just gathered. We'd swing out and each time catch up a peach and while we ate it we'd let the cat die . . . Then we'd swing out for another, and so on for the best of the afternoon."

"Pigs!"

"Not at all! We don't eat slabs of beef and mutton, and we don't drink wine."

"No? I've seen two little squinny Americans punish a magnum of champagne."

"I can only tell you," she said with tragic solemnity, "I learn something new here every blessed day."

She stared at him as Michael "for no earthly reason" dissolved in a gale of laughter.

CHAPTER IX

EVEN before he laughed like that she had no intention of telling him that one of her chief objects of study was the way the whole house and everybody in it turned round himself. Even old Mrs. Nancarrow seemed to feel the fitness of that. "Oh, if Michael says so—"

Before any horse, or motor, was so much as asked for (and no one more punctilious in this respect than Nelly and Michael's mother): "What will Mr. Nancarrow be using?"—or even remotely likely to want?

Of lesser importance and still, as Camilla envisaged the matter, very necessary for her to understand, was the attitude of the countryside towards these people, and of these people to the countryside.

A good proportion of the big houses round about seemed to be occupied by relations, either in blood or, more or less closely, by marriage. Those who were neither, with few exceptions such as the Fairbairns, seemed to dwell in an outer darkness impenetrable to Camilla's eyes. Yet these people were to be her neighbours—her friends, she hoped, in spite of a general impression that they were wholly negligible unless, indeed, fit subjects for passing ridicule. Just why they should be—ah! that was one of the things she must find out.

In the midst of these unvoiced perplexities, some London acquaintances of hers, the Glendowers of Glendower Castle, motored over to offer Mrs. Trenholme their felicitations. Though she had never cared about the Glendowers, their visit pleased her. Chiefly, because she thought Mrs. Nancarrow would be pleased, at discovering that her prospective daughter-in-law had Cumberland acquaintances of such importance.

But behold! when the Glendowers had gone, a little interval of obvious restraint (during which the visitors were referred to distantly as "your friends") was followed by Camilla's owning how very little in point of fact she knew them. How the more surprised and touched she was by the cordiality of their welcome to Cumberland.

"*Their* welcome!" laughed Alice, and upon that a light shower of disdainful comment. Mrs. Nancarrow, more precise, explained that Lord Glendower was a South Country Nobody, who had dared to assume a historic Cumberland name. The London lawyer had been calling himself Glendower for ten years now. Yet no one *up here* thought of him as anything but "that lawyer Tomlinson."

Camilla ventured to remonstrate. "All your families must have had a beginning."

Michael, amused, upheld her:

> "When Adam digged and Eve span,
> Who was then your gentleman?"

"And he *is* a peer, after all," she said to the widow of a commoner.

"He's a law-lord, *that's* what old Tomlinson is!" And the tone in which old Mrs. Nancarrow said law-lord made Camilla turn to Michael.

"What dreadful thing is a law-lord?"

But Michael would do nothing but laugh.

"Lord Glendower can't help being a new creation," Camilla urged.

"No, but he *could* have helped stealing one of our good old names, and pulling down what remained of Glendower's Keep and building on that historic site a—Pah!"

So it was that "her friends" the Glendowers afforded her a first glimpse of the contempt felt by the old landed

gentry for new peerages, and the parvenu assumption of ancient privilege. After law-lords, city knights came in for a drubbing. "Your linendraper, or instrument maker, who happens to be mayor when the King comes to open a new school-house!" Camilla recognized the offender in question. The afternoon call made by the mayor's "lady" had supplied the Nancarrows with abundant amusement. Sir James Capper had done only what an endless procession of respectable tradesmen had done without the least notice being taken of them. But Capper happens to be in office when the King, passing through the town, stops long enough to lay a certain corner-stone. A by-product of royal alchemy turns the mayor into a knight and his wife into "my lady," who may for ever after go in to dinner before Mrs. Nancarrow. Naturally Mrs. Nancarrow avoided presenting society with a spectacle so unedifying. She never went to dinners where the company was mixed.

The rule held good in London when, on the rare occasions of late years, Mrs. Nancarrow appeared in town.

She even enforced the rule upon her grandchildren.

She had, for Camilla, the air of consciously standing between her granddaughters and Alice's "spirit of social adventure," as she called it.

That in these matters Mrs. George saw eye to eye with her mother-in-law could surprise no one. The odd thing was that Alice herself accepted meekly, you might almost say with gratitude, the restrictions enjoined upon her own girls.

Old Mrs. Nancarrow's disdain for "pinchbeck Glendowers" was outstripped by her disapproval of the London "smart set." The lamentable changes in the social world since Mrs. Nancarrow's youth, made the "bringing out" of young girls a process which called for constant avoidance of pitfalls. Blanche and Diana were to be presented at the next Court by a great-aunt who was also a great lady. Mrs. Nancarrow had given fair no-

tice: their London season, as little or as much as they might suitably have, was to be achieved without the assistance of any of "Alice's shady duchesses." Charity balls at London hotels, forsooth! Blanche and Diana were to come out at the Hunt Ball in their own county. "And we will have the usual parties here."

"Yes," said Diana with a *moue*, "and dance with a lot of cousins."

"Dance with people *we know*."

The perplexing part of it all was that in many ways Mrs. Nancarrow was more democratic than any American of position Camilla had ever known. She knew far more about the lives of the poor. She was in infinitely more human relations with them.

It was a revelation to go about the village with Michael's mother. The people, independent, "not to be druv," evidently entertained a sound opinion not only of the lady's good intentions, but of her long-proved power to help. Her relation to these cottagers and farmers was not so very unlike her relation to the occupants of the Nancarrow nursery. She scolded them and dosed them; she helped them in a thousand ways; had their sons taught at her own expense; brought their daughters "out" into the world of service; watched over their sick; sat with their dying, wept with them over their dead.

Though Michael knew that going out with the guns was little to Camilla's liking, he seemed always to want her, to expect her to "come along," except when, as he said, he lent her to his mother. On such occasions the two would go driving out behind Mrs. Nancarrow's ponies to the evident satisfaction of both women. Mrs. Nancarrow drove well. The exercise suited her, stimulated her. She was at her brisk kindest during these outings. A tentative question or two from Camilla about Michael's boyhood evoked a store of little stories such as mothers hoard. They could not so well be shared

at any other time, for Michael barred these reminiscences. "It's an unfair advantage to take," he'd say. But Camilla would beg, "Go on, I could listen all day to stories about Michael when he was little."

Mrs. Nancarrow always said "small."

The stories were very endearing. Camilla and Michael's mother, turning on a sudden impulse, saw each in the other's eyes, not the shining of laughter only, but the shining of happy tears. As suddenly as the softening would come some sharpness. "There's his monstrosity: That's your friend Tomlinson's idea of establishing himself as a country gentleman."

Camilla looked up the side of the deep-cut lane, awed in that first instant by the sheer ascent, continued skyward in mighty blocks of rough-hewn stone, and crowned by a castle, all towers and battlements, the walls pierced by the suspicious lancet, the foundations eyed with round gun-holes.

"A fairly faithful imitation of a mediaeval fortress; the only trouble about it is it's six hundred years too late. And you can't hoodwink Time, even if you *are* a lawyer."

Without scruple Camilla abandoned the Glendowers to scorn. "Certainly I'd rather live in that square house down there by the weir."

"Humph!" said Mrs. Nancarrow, "you seem to think your preferences modest. That's Tenby. It is one of the most perfect specimens of domestic Tudor in the county. Since you like it, I hope you'll often come there."

When Camilla asked her what she meant: "It's the Nancarrow Dower House," the old lady said. "George has lent it to his great aunt and two boring cousins, till we get the proper sort of tenant. You can't let a house as near you as that without knowing a good deal about the people. We couldn't tell," she smiled at her com-

panion, "that a quite proper tenant would be so soon forthcoming."

And she meant herself!

"You would leave Nancarrow!"

"Well, what do you suppose a dower-house is for? The Dowager Mrs. Nancarrow, like the Dowager everybody else, makes way for the young couple."

Out of the longest silence that yet had fallen between them: "You don't like it, after all," Camilla said in a low, even voice, "Michael's marrying me."

"What has that to do with it?" Mrs. Nancarrow demanded with a wounding sharpness. Plans of this nature were envisaged years and years before there could be any question of carrying them out. "It was settled before you were born."

"Oh, no!" said Camilla, thinking too intently of her failure with Michael's mother to realize the construction that might be put upon her candour: "Alice has told me what a pity it is that George will never be able to live here—at least until his children are—what she calls 'off his hands.'"

Mrs. Nancarrow gave her companion a sidewise glance. Was this American jingling her money-bags?

"I don't know why I should have hoped," Camilla went on in the dull voice that she took refuge in when she was specially moved, "but I have hoped you wouldn't like me so much less than Nelly. You've managed to put up with her."

"I haven't disliked either of you—so far," the old woman hedged thornily; "but, as I gather you know," she went on at her stiffest, "the sole condition of our keeping Nancarrow of late years has been that we should pool the family resources. That need, I'm given to understand, will no longer exist, after—"

"It's a pity!"—Camilla, who rarely interrupted, threw in the words with that dulness of accent which

effectually disguised her inclination to tears. "It's a pity you don't like me."

"Who says I—" Mrs. Nancarrow, turning brusquely, saw that Camilla's eyes, heavy with unhappiness, were fixed upon Nancarrow. Yet never had Nancarrow looked more fair. This was the stretch of avenue, halfway from the park gates, that held you for some moments in full sight of the house. It stood there in its autumnal-tinted setting, wearing its ancient valour like a coat of arms; clothed in sunshine and in beauty of that heart-searching sort seldom denied the homes of men, even those most modest, if so be the homes endure.

"Why are you looking like that?" demanded Mrs. Nancarrow. "Doesn't the house please you?"

She put pressure on her voice to answer steadily. "I can only tell you all the beauty will go out of it for me, if—just because I'm coming to live here—you . . ." She broke off, and then with sudden passion: "Apart from you—and Michael and me—it's a horrid idea!"

And what was "horrid" turned out to be the revered institution of the Dower House. In the face of a custom wholly natural and matter-of-fact to the person most immediately concerned, Camilla's inexplicable distress found tongue.

"How you can tolerate it!" She fixed her eyes for one instant full on the time-marked face beside her. It seemed to her in this unsparing light very, very old; piteous—in the indomitable sort of way most piteous of all. "And you were young when you came here. A bride. Michael—all your babies born here. The one that died—" Mrs. Nancarrow turned her head and looked into the depths of the many-coloured beeches. "And he, too"—the low voice went on—"your husband. All the great things in your life. All the little things, too. Most of all the little things. The place must swarm for you. I should think you'd grown into the very walls. And you are to be uprooted, just because—"

The unprecedented emission of words ceased abruptly. Quite gently for her, and still looking into beech-bough shade and shine, Mrs. Nancarrow said yet again that she had "always expected—"

"Not if you liked Michael's wife, surely, surely."

. . . . . .

Camilla ran through the house on their return. "Michael! Where's Michael?"

A man's step hurrying, a door flung open. "What's happened?"

She poured it out. English women were extraordinary. She couldn't understand them. "Caring for it all as she does, and yet willing, without a word—"

"Why, Camilla, you aren't crying?"

"She talks about it as George's. *George's*, who doesn't *want* to live here. Who's hardly been here since he was a child. Even you, away all your school days. And in America, and off shooting and yachting. She always here. Why, it's your mother's Nancarrow more than anybody's living. I'm only asking for a share in it—I thought I might *earn* a share by loving it, and by—not bringing unhappiness here—"

Michael, immensely bewildered, had his handkerchief out. "I never heard of such a thing to cry about!" She stood in front of him sniffing like an absurd child, while he dried her cheeks. "You mustn't, dearest—"

"But can't you see," she demanded, "it would spoil my feeling that everything is so—so *safe* here?"

"Why should it?"

And suddenly the small child vanished. It was the being with memories, with unhealed wounds and unforgettable griefs, that answered: "I've had *my* home taken away from me—" The tragic eyes completed the confession: it's the worst that can happen to a woman.

She left the personal application as quickly as she had introduced it. "I can see why Nelly should want her own house. But if your mother went, I shouldn't want

to come here. I told her instead of letting it to us, they could let it to strangers." Camilla was more in earnest than he'd ever seen her.

"What did she say—my mother?"

"She said: 'It's a thing I should never advise anybody else to do.'"

"Oh! then she means to give you your way. But what a strange child—so prompt to settle that, and about the most important thing of all so—"

But she wasn't. She proved it. "The most important thing of all" was settled then and there. The wedding was fixed for "a month from tomorrow." And Camilla was to spend "as much as possible" of the intervening time at Nancarrow.

"You'll like to do that in any case, *won't* you?" he pleaded. As for him, he was obliged to be here. There was a good deal to do in view of going abroad again so soon.

The first week of the honeymoon was to be at Felton, standing empty at the moment. Then two weeks at Lugano—and so, home.

. . . . . .

Mrs. Nancarrow agreed to continue for a time unspecified to direct the house, and Nelly and her brood were to go to Tenby.

"Yes," Camilla owned privately, "I begin to feel you're right, Michael. She likes me. I *think* she does."

"You think!" he mocked. "Maybe you think I like you?"

She didn't explain the grounds of her mental reservation. She recognized the reasons, both in feeling and in fact, which accounted for Michael's not caring to reopen the past. For one thing he had an acquaintance with it which no one else here had. He already knew as much as he felt to be essential. He had his own picture of the Camilla of other days. She found it natural that he should not wish to revive memories which, at

best, must be jarring to his jealous absorption in the Camilla who was his alone.

But the others. His mother above all. After those few trenchant questions and the comment that had put Camilla to flight at the time of the first visit, Mrs. Nancarrow never, directly or indirectly, so much as suggested the subject of Camilla's American associations. They seemed not to interest her any more—or, more exactly, not to exist.

Camilla had hardly made up her mind never to speak of this to Michael, when, one evening up in his sitting-room, she threw her resolve to the winds. A thing done apparently on the spur of the moment; yet, as she obscurely knew, done at the bidding of that instinct in her to set up some barrier (if only such as a moment's diversion of thought would offer) before a phase of love-making that threatened to sweep her away.

"Your mother never asks me about my home," she said. "Do you think she's afraid?"

"Afraid!"

"Yes, that must be it. Always thinking, I suppose, that she may bring up against Leroy."

"Oh, I don't imagine that's the case at all!"

She wondered a little at his cloudless face.

As the days went on she came to see that Michael was right. For Mrs. Nancarrow Camilla came into the world on the day she came into Nancarrow Hall. The absence of interest in the pre-European life was no pretence; neither mask for disapproval nor cloak for personal shrinking. It was plain, solid, impermeable indifference.

It did not for some reason wholly please the prospective daughter-in-law. "Are you like that too, Michael?" she asked, after saying she didn't believe his mother knew where America was on the map.

"Well, you see, I've had to look it up," he laughed.

"Have you? I sometimes feel I dreamed that too.

I sometimes feel I dreamed twenty-seven years of my life. Then a word—a little, little word, and all this disappears, and I'm back there again."

"Back where, dear one?"

"Down yonder in the pinewoods."

His lips on hers made whispering: "Come home."

CHAPTER X

NO, no, she wasn't to be allowed to go to London to get clothes. She had more clothes now than any mortal woman needed.

"Besides, there's the post," said Diana. "*Don't* go."

"The *post!*" Camilla smiled; she didn't see the point, but it must be a joke. "I have to see the things—to choose—"

"Of course you do. They'll send you masses to choose from. It's quite easy to do by post. I shall."

"You shall what?"

But Diana only flung her arms round Camilla, repeating "*Don't* go. Something terrific is going to happen. We want you here. No, no, not another word!" She wouldn't have said as much as that to any earthly soul except Camilla.

In spite of her self-absorption and Michael-absorption, Camilla had been aware of the undercurrent of excitement that carried a sparkling happiness through certain channels of the younger life in the house. She was fully aware, too, of another current, more marked on the surface. A moody restlessness swept Alice St. Amant to and fro between ebullitions of frothy, rather bitter high spirits and the deeps of depression. But even Camilla's sensitiveness could not imagine this new phase had anything to do with herself. Everybody else was so adorably kind, that she came to think—Michael apart—never, never again should she feel alone, never again lack "love and friending."

. . . . . .

"I believe they like me better than you do," she announced in unusual spirits. "*You* never said a word against my going away."

He didn't know, he excused himself, what preparations she might have to make. "We'll have to go into that." And then, studying her face with smiling perplexity, "For a serious person, you know, you take some things with a lightness that borders on frivolity." And there, on the lawn, with people walking about, he began to talk about the formalities necessary to marriage by Special License.

Camilla showed no enthusiasm for "that way." "Don't let us have anything 'special' or out of the common."

It was true, she found, what Diana had said; though instead of doing her ordering by post, Camilla did it by telegraph. In the result she discovered yet another aspect of that English "difference" with which she seemed to be making fresh acquaintance daily. The tradesmen's response came in no mere envelope of samples—or "patterns," as these people called them. Your London shopkeeper seemed ready to ship the very best of his stock to Nancarrow—or no, as Alice said, you didn't "ship things on land in England." By post or by "goods train," the boxes and packages poured in, till Camilla's bedroom looked like the showroom of a fashionable modiste.

Not for a long, long time had gowns and wraps and scarves, and hats looked so entrancingly pretty and gay to Camilla. The reason was not altogether in her own happier eyes. These new "fal-lals," as Michael called them, were the first coloured things Camilla had ordered for several years. In addition to that circumstance, a great factor in the fun of having all these charming things raining in, was the rapture with which they were inspected and pulled about—yes, and tried on, sometimes, at Camilla's suggestion by Blanche or Diana—even by the Flapper Marjory. Things kept arriving, ravishing beyond denial, which yet, according to Camilla, were "too juvenile" or "not my colour" or "rather flyaway,

don't you think? No? Well, let us see how it looks on you."

The number of things which suited Diana was remarkable. Then other things had to be found which "did for" Blanche. And Marjory had to be "squared" privately. Everybody was quite foolishly happy except Michael, who kept coming to the door with injurious remarks about the vanity of woman, and wanting to know when Camilla would be ready to come out.

Camilla's main impression—and she went back to it again and again—how much more happy a world it was than she had been thinking.

Fast locked as she kept that other, the memory-filled bridal chamber of ten years ago—never a foot across that threshold—she allowed one contrast between then and now to point her pleasure in "the English way."

After those lavish, much talked and written about nuptials at the New York house of Camilla's sister—the cost of that wedding would be a handsome dot to a dowerless girl—Leroy had taken Camilla to the show suite in a monster hotel for the honeymoon. That flying, backward glance showed her no one who had objected or sympathized, and many who envied. Having in her mind merely countered the hotel with "a country house, all to ourselves for that first week, and then the Italian lakes," she sheered away. One of her dodges for evading certain memories was to meet the enemy boldly on other than the intimately individual ground. She was ready to do this not only in private. Certain of the differences in social habit she would have quite liked to hear openly discussed; some of the resemblances she longed to hear admitted. Michael was no good at this game, unless others were present.

In the absence of his family Michael was always branching off to chins, and the way you smiled, and what they would do at Felton where he'd often been as a boy.

Dearly Camilla would have liked to take one or two of the Nancarrow people (and quite particularly Michael's mother) into the world across the water, that they might feel a little of that understanding and confidence in the life over there which she was learning here. Above all she wanted to let these new friends know that her "people," too, were respect-worthy. Nobody here seemed to care in the least about that.

It struck her as very strange. In one conceivable contingency it would matter to the most indifferent what sort of blood she brought into the family.

In her heart she began to think with passion of children. Of children who would be Nancarrows and yet, miracle of miracles, welding the dissimilar, uniting worlds wide-parted—Nancarrows the children would be, and yet hers.

Obliviousness on the part of the rest of the family to America and things American, was not shared by Alice. Yet Alice's form of interest turned out more trying than the unplumbed indifference of others. Lady St. Amant had never been to America. But that fact was no bar to having her theories about "the States," as she called them. As for Camilla, she was as accustomed as most people living out of their own country, to hear childish or grotesque judgments from those who form opinion upon insufficient material. For reasons having their roots in a remote and tranquil past, her father's child ran none of the risks which dog your rawer patriot. It would never occur to Camilla to meet misapprehension half-way, to anticipate slights, to seize every opportunity, sensibly or silly, to Hail Columbia!—and to proclaim her Super-Excellence from alien housetops.

What Leroy Trenholme in the early days of their marriage called "Camilla's talent for silence," had enabled her many a time to suffer false conclusions (innocent or perverse) to go their way unchidden. That particular "talent" failed her before Alice St. Amant's dis-

position to draw the most sweeping generalizations from her observation of the few hundred Americans who *affichée* themselves in the smart hotels of Europe. One might one's self be secure enough in a grounded love and honour of one's own country to feel no uneasiness on the score of America. Such uneasiness as Camilla was conscious of, was for the Nancarrows. They, or, to be precise, that one of them who cared to know, ought to be enlightened, even by a halting tongue.

One of Lady St. Amant's most cherished ideas was that, bar two or three millionaire families, nobody in America had the least notion who his grandfather was. She was honestly astonished at the suggestion of any difference in social grade "over there." "Aren't you a Republic?"

"Yes," Michael had answered for Camilla. "So are the French."

"Oh! but France *has* been something else. That old *noblesse* of the Faubourg—"

"We aren't talking about the nobility, are we, Camilla?"

Camilla thought how perfectly he understood, till she said: "No, we are talking about commoners like you Nancarrows."

Michael blinked at that. It was clear that Michael, too, had his doubts about matching the Nancarrows. All that she meant, Camilla hastened to say, was that there were families in America—like her own, she threw in—who for a couple of hundred years had been people of education.

"*Really!*" Alice, with eyes widened to astonishment, could only suppose, "that's because you're a Southerner."

"Not in the least," Camilla hastened to say. She'd just like the New Englanders to hear Alice. "Or the old Knickerbockers of New York."

"The old *what!* Old knicker—" Alice rocked with

laughter. "Oh, Nelly dear, do you know they've named the *élite* of Noo York 'Old Knickerbockers!' Oh, la, la! The lower orders, 'sole leather,' I suppose. What? The betwixt and betweens—the middle class: 'gaiters'—eh? Upper ten: 'old knickers!' Oh, la, la!"

It was a poor joke. The sting of it lay in the laughter evoked.

For some reason unknown to Camilla, Alice's capriciousness had been steadily increasing. There were times when she appeared to find her one relief from depression in teasing Camilla; moods in which her main object in life seemed to be scoring off you, showing up your slower-moving, more matter-of-fact mind—all with a kind of tricksy friendliness—sometimes disarmingly remorseful.

"What do you bear with me, Camilla? Why don't you clout me over the head? Don't look like that. See, I'm sorry."

If she had been really wounding—then a very fountain of affection and endearment. Nobody had ever been able to help forgiving Alice in this mood.

"Come and take my part," Alice called to her mother out of the window. "Camilla's quarrelling with me because we make no distinction between Americans."

Mrs. Nancarrow was taking a turn in the garden with her son. They stopped under the drawing-room window, Michael smiling in at Camilla with what Alice paused to characterize aside as "his air of fatuous content." "She says," Alice went on, raising her voice, "Americans find in our drawing-rooms over here compatriots they would never run the least risk of meeting at home—not if they lived to the age of Methuselah! But we, she says, we lump Americans all together. The English are just as pleased with the shoddy as with the Simon pure, according to Camilla."

"It's true," said Camilla, abashed but impenitent. "—at least in London."

"Oh, *London!*" Mrs. Nancarrow gave up London.

"Camilla's been trying to explain it. She is good enough to imply we don't need to go over the water for good taste or good manners. We've got all that—"

"*Some* of you," said Camilla, to her own surprise.

"Score! Score for Camilla!" Michael led the chorus of youthful applause.

The clock golfers, too, had gathered to the fray.

". . . And we don't need anybody," Alice went on unperturbed, "to help us to amuse ourselves out of doors. But indoors, according to Camilla, we are dull."

"Oh! I never said—"

"Well, that's what I gathered. So indoors, when we are grimly stowing away our dinners or sitting torpid afterwards in our drawing-rooms, we want, especially" (she tilted her head at Michael) "our men want, to be amused." She looked round with her provocative air. "And the Americans can do the trick."

"Alice, your use of slang—" Mrs. Nancarrow had not liked the conversation.

"It's quite good American; isn't it, Camilla? Well, according to you, the more odd and different from us the American is, the more we take to her, the more she's a howling success."

"In London," again Camilla hedged.

"London society," said Mrs. Nancarrow, "is very different from what it was in my day."

"How, mother dearest?" Alice's eyes winked maliciously.

"People—the best people—lived more simply. Money used not to be a passport. But the whole standard of living has changed."

"What do you suppose is the reason?" Alice insisted.

"The millionaire Americans, I am told," replied Mrs. Nancarrow.

Camilla's eyes went to Michael.

"What about the millionaire South Africans?" he

demanded. "And our own home-grown brewers and grocers?"

But Alice had divagated to journalism. "Look at the effect of Americanizing our press!"

Again Michael was in the breach. "What we called 'American' was simply a convenient word for a world tendency."

"Then why is it known everywhere as American?" demanded his sister.

"Simply because where everybody is doing it more or less, the Americans are doing it best"—and would Camilla come out to the Fives Court?

She rose with unmistakable alacrity.

"Of course I don't mean our dear Camilla." With obvious reluctance Alice permitted dear Camilla's escape through the French window, while obliging the company outside with a hasty sketch of the Americans who stay at home—"people," according to Alice, "with pasty complexions who sit by hot pipes and eat pie."

As Michael and Camilla went down the path Alice called out an inquiry about American mildew. As this received no notice, she ran after them. "I don't believe you understand an English rag. Our schoolboys break us in. Kiss me this instant, Camilla. And you tell her, Michael," she struggled against a fit of coughing, "she's not to look like that when we rag her."

"She shall look as she pleases," Michael said, smiling. "And you'd better go indoors and mend your manners."

She didn't go in. On the contrary, she went down the avenue as if she were expecting some one. Michael followed her an instant with his eyes.

"I am afraid you are anxious about her."

Michael turned and looked at Camilla a little curiously. "Why do you think that?"

"Because you are all so forbearing, so very gentle with her."

"My mother is a little anxious when the cough comes back."

"You aren't?"

"No. It's more nerves than anything else." Michael seemed anxious to dismiss the subject. "Hi!"—he hailed diversion in the person of the young man crossing the lawn—"coming for a game, Alec?"

Alec would have liked to most awfully, but he'd just promised—he looked back at the house.

"Oh! Blanche has got the first call? All right, all right."

It was the frankest reference yet made to the young man's status there. He turned away a confused face and went with an air of precipitate relief to meet the horde pouring out at the front door.

"Are you sure it's Blanche?" Camilla asked.

Before Michael could more than assure her that "beyond doubt—" the troop of young people, laughing and hotly arguing, came running down the path to the Fives Court.

"Yes, Camilla first," they heard Diana's voice high over all. "Well, Uncle Michael then. Isn't he the head of the family? Uncle Michael! Look!"

Michael turned, racquet in hand. "What's up? You're very gorgeous."

"Yes, aren't I?" Diana twirled about in the doorway and stepped out into the court with a flourish. "Present from Camilla. Just before tea."

"It's much too fine."

"Too fine for a going-away frock!"

"For going away where?" asked the purblind man.

"Haven't got as far as where. The only thing I've decided is my clo'es and who I'm going with."

Camilla went to the child and kissed her. Then she held out a hand to young Fairbairn.

"You don't mean—" Michael began.

"Well, who else should I go away with but Alec?"

With quite needless delicacy neither Michael nor Camilla looked at Blanche. Her somewhat stolid good-humour was wholly unruffled, as they saw after congratulating the engaged pair and scolding them for not first telling Mrs. Nancarrow.

"It's Blanche's fault, she always tells Tony. And somehow it spread among the lower orders first." Diana looked round laughing at her sisters and cousins.

"It'll be frightful fun," Blanche said, "having a wedding at Nancarrow."

Her uncle agreed. "Oh, yes, nothing like a village wedding—" then he interrupted himself. "If you don't go and confess your sins to your grandmother, you won't be given a wedding at all."

Mrs. Nancarrow was plainly more taken aback at Alec's choice than Mrs. George was. Her maternal heart had had misgivings. But apart from their sympathy with Diana's radiant happiness, both ladies were alive to the advantage of keeping Alec in the family. The amiable Nelly consoled herself with the thought that her niece's early removal from the sphere of rivalship would indubitably make plainer sailing in the future for Blanche.

The strange thing for Camilla was that Diana's mother was less enthusiastic about the engagement than anybody. "Makes me feel a hundred," she confided. "A few months and that minx of mine will be making me a grandmother. *Me . . . !!*"

Though her cough was worse, Alice's restlessness wouldn't allow her to stay indoors and take proper care of herself. Telegrams were always coming for her. Whenever she went for a walk she sent one—never from her own village post office, but from some outlying hamlet. Camilla, too, was still having telegrams now and then—or, more properly speaking, cables of congratulation, as the news spread on the other side. One of these

messages had come after tea and she had been teased for not showing it. "It's only from Florida," she said.

. . . . . .

Camilla was all but late for dinner that night. When she reached the halfway landing on the long staircase, her heart misgave her. They were all waiting for her down there in the hall! With an absurd *soulagement* she perceived that Alice was later still.

For some reason the familiar scene below there struck her tonight as with a new significance. Was any other interior so stately as this, lit still by lamps?

"I suppose you'll be putting in electricity," Alice had said. When Camilla disavowed any such vandal project, Alice exclaimed, "Oh, *won't* you? I would in your place. It would be an immense improvement." Even Mrs. Nancarrow admitted that George had had estimates submitted— "But it was something colossal. According to our modest standards," she added; and then, showing a glimpse of that dignity of acceptance both of what had been withheld and what was to come, Nancarrow, she said, would be one of the last houses in England to yield to electricity. And when it *had* yielded it would, without doubt, be less Nancarrow.

"It shall stay like this for my time," Camilla vowed to herself as she began to descend the last flight.

Certainly the light of shaded lamps suited Nancarrow's sober state. It gave value to the high notes in the picture which a glare of electricity would have cancelled—those beautiful hide-and-seek flickerings of fire reflected upon brass and polished oak, on the full-length portraits, on the faces of the living (so like them) gathered at the chimneypiece round the white-haired woman and her son.

Over his mother's shoulder Michael kept an eye upon the stair. That look Camilla was coming to count on—the look of waiting. Then the lit gladness, as the turn in the long staircase brought him the sight of her;

brought her the eyes that thanked her for being there, thanked her for putting on white for him tonight.

People of his blood, those he loved about him; his mother still holding him there with talk. But his soul gone to meet the stranger on the stair. Stranger? No. "One of them."

How wonderful life was!

Michael had kept her till the last minute after the dressing-bell rang, talking about their plans. But it had all been Felton and Lugano and what they would do when they came back from the wedding journey. Did men usually take no interest in where they were married, Camilla had just been wondering to herself as she dressed in a whirl.

The catch on her necklace had not been securely clasped. The jewels were sliding down now, like cold drops of rain. As she stopped on the last step to fasten the catch, her handkerchief fluttered to the floor.

Cousin Charles Heathcote over his abundant abdominal development made a dignified feint in the general direction of the handkerchief—an impressionist sketch, so to speak, of a stout gentleman nobly ready to inconvenience himself in the service of lovely woman. But Alec and Diana raced one another from the end of the hall. Diana, with her advantage at the start, reached the goal first and turned to mock at Alec. The long-legged, long-armed young gentleman had slipped on the polished floor and recovered himself only by wild balancings and mirth-provoking clutchings at the air.

And this is yours too? Diana had found a folded paper near the handkerchief. No, not hers. Camilla was in the act of turning her back on the laughing pair when some obscure impulse arrested her. The two young heads were close together over the opened telegram. Alec had more eyes for the charming face so near his own than for the paper, but Diana's smooth forehead was puckered in perplexity. As Camilla tried to take

the telegram, the girl lifted it high over her head: "No, wait. It's the queerest—I haven't got the hang of it yet."

"Why should you get the hang of my telegrams?" Camilla reached up and took it out of the girl's hand.

Oh! was it the one she wouldn't show? "If I were *you*," Alec began gaily to Michael.

Diana interrupted him. "Hush! it's Camilla's affair, not yours." She led the way back to the fire.

Camilla's own stark perplexity as she read the unsigned message dissolved suddenly in a rush of embarrassed agitation.

"No bad news?" Michael joined her.

"No—oh, not at all!" She put the folded paper in her belt. She knew now why Alice was late—looking frantically for the lost message. She suggested going up for her. But Mrs. Nancarrow said in her peremptory way it was bad enough to have one of the party late, without having two.

"It's all right," Camilla whispered, as Alice passed to her place a few moments after the rest were seated.

"What's all right?" she said curtly, and everybody looked up.

Poor Alice! She must be forgiven for declining to accept any assurance of all-rightness short of the possession of the tell-tale message. All through dinner Camilla could think of little else than of Alice and her lover. That whole situation had slipped so far into the background, that it had come to seem wholly unreal. Some quality in the atmosphere of Nancarrow acted as a solvent upon intrigue. Its firmness of outline had faded, it had receded, it had vanished, till that scrap of paper so unblushingly, so outrageously proclaimed it—the skeleton in the family cupboard. That Alice's own daughter should have chanced on it . . .!! Camilla squirmed in her chair. Had Diana read as little, understood as little as she pretended? The girl's mother must

be spared the knowledge of who had first picked up the message.

The first instant Camilla could make her way after dinner to Alice's side: "I've got it!" she whispered and looked round guiltily to make sure no one could conceivably have overheard.

"Got what?" demanded Alice with her new *brusquerie.*

"Sh!" Camilla glanced round once more. The hands that extricated the slip of paper from her belt shook with nervousness. "Picked up in the hall," she explained.

As the telegram was being opened Camilla put herself between the rest of the party and Alice.

She crumpled the paper in her hand. "It's an old one," she said discontentedly. "One of last week's."

"You ought to be more careful," said Camilla.

"Why?"

"*Any*body might . . . why, your . . ." (shame forbade her to say daughter) "your mother might have read it."

Alice reopened the wad she had made and glanced again at the wording as though to see more precisely what all this to-do was about. "There's nothing so *very*—" she said.

"Well, it's not from Shropshire."

"Why should it be from Shropshire?"

"Why should such a message be coming from *that* address? It's a lover's message!"

Alice went over to the fire and dropped the telegram on the coals.

CHAPTER XI

WE are told that James Russell Lowell once pointed out a wild flower, or some common object, saying that he supposed he was the only person of his acquaintance who didn't know the name of it. From the age of pupillage to that hour he had put off admitting the fact. He contended there were such holes in everybody's stock of knowledge—questions which, because they weren't asked at the right moment, are never asked at all; commonplace whys and wherefores you think it shame not already to know, words which, to the day of your death, you'll feel uneasy at the thought of pronouncing, or helpless before the task of defining.

Certainly there is a moment of psychological fitness for many things besides the flood that leads to fortune.

Camilla found she had evaded talking about the details of her marriage till she had brought herself to a point of sensitiveness on the subject which refused to yield before her private assurance that she was being absurd. If only she had said in the first instance, "Where shall we be married?" The putting of that simple, necessary question had now come to wear an air quite harassingly difficult. Nelly had said that she was married here. "I hadn't any real home or belongings of my own," she explained.

Camilla very definitely did have a home of her own. In her heart, she believed that out of some feeling of delicacy, Nancarrow had not in her case been suggested, for fear she should want to be married from her own house. Michael had even, as she now remembered, sounded her about that. Quite soon after her return here, he said: "In America you are usually married in

the drawing-room of the bride's house, aren't you?" And all she had answered was: "A great many are."

Diana's wedding, as everybody knew, was to be at Christmas.

A poor arrangement, the children declared, because you thereby ran the awful risk of people's giving you your Christmas presents as a wedding gift. "All the rest of your life," the precocious Peggy assured her sister, "people will be rolling two of your presents into one. Why, it's as bad as having Christmas for your birthday."

Diana, quite undeterred at this prospect, nevertheless sought sympathy from Camilla. "Don't you think a Christmas wedding is the very jolliest kind of wedding? —next, of course," she threw in with gay compunction, "next to one in November."

For some reason a gulf seemed, at that moment, to dispart the grey month from the time of double festivity, the Christmas chimes and Diana's wedding-bells.

"Is there some special reason for yours and Alec's not being a little sooner?" Camilla asked. "We might have had it on the same day."

The girl stared.

"A double wedding, you know. I've heard that is the cheerfullest wedding of all."

"Yes, I dare say. But . . . I'm going to be married here."

"Of course," the other assented, and left it there.

But the girl's look of perplexity followed Camilla. She tried to think back. Two things only occurred to her as bearing on the matter. One, a word Mrs. Nancarrow had let drop a day or two before Diana's engagement—something to Michael about "the preliminaries" which she seemed to think might involve "going to town." Michael had answered casually: "Time enough for all that." The second occasion was in the midst of a great family discussion as to which cousins

on each side should be asked to be Diana's bridesmaids, and how furious the left-out ones would be, and should the bridesmaids be dressed like the Romney ancestress, or "in the very latest"?

"What a comfort," Michael said aside to Camilla, "that we aren't going to have all that irrelevant fuss!"

For any lack of "fuss" on the part of her seniors, Diana seemed disposed to make the handsomest amends. In truth—and largely through Camilla's connivance—the balance of interest among the younger members of the household had now quite definitely shifted to Diana.

Afternoon visits of cheerful ceremony were exchanged between the elders of the families of Fairbairn and Nancarrow, and the next great event was Diana's week at Threllhow.

"You've never been there?" Camilla asked, a little bewildered at the excitement over the prospect.

"Oh, yes, but not since—Threllhow became so important. For the matter of that, not since *I* became so important," she laughed. Then, grave and full of care: "This will be my—what Alec calls my first 'official visit.' Oh, dearest Camilla, don't you think . . . (I've been quite stiff with anxiety since Alec called it that) don't you think you could come along just as a—a bodyguard? Mummy is going to motor me over, and I'd like it dreadfully if *you* came."

"Why? are they such ogres?"—Camilla had been away on an expedition with Nelly and Michael the day the elder Fairbairns had motored over from the far side of the county.

"Ogres!" Diana echoed indignantly. "What an idea! Perfect dears. And now I think you've simply got to come and make up for calling them names. Besides," she slipped her hand through Camilla's arm and turned up her face quite in the beguiling way of her mother, "the other time I was there I didn't know they were going to be my in-laws. It's *most* important for

me to make a nice impression this time. Do come and help me to make a nice impression!"

. . . . . .

Diana, sitting bodkin between her mother and Camilla, every now and then during the drive kept feeling for Camilla's hand; especially at such moments as those Alice devoted to making fun of "that couple of old bores," Major and Mrs. Fairbairn. "Oh, the salt of the earth—but *poor* Di! how she'll stand it after Nancarrow! . . ."

"She'll have Alec," Camilla suggested.

And that elicited another grateful squeeze; while her mother, map in hand, was arguing with the chauffeur about the most direct road, the girl said in a burst of affection to Camilla: "You were good to come! *Please* be at Nancarrow when I get back."

"I thought you were only going to stay till Tuesday."

"Yes. Tuesday. But," she remarked eagerly, "as grandmamma says, you'll have other things to see to besides clothes."

"What other things does she mean?"

"Well, I suppose she thinks you'll want to see your lawyer. Or will you send for him?"

"Lawyer!" Camilla echoed, extremely astonished. "Why should I want to see a lawyer? I haven't got a lawyer."

"Haven't you?"

"No, I'm glad to say I *haven't.*" Lawyers in Camilla's mind were inextricably associated with trouble and conflict. What was there in her life, now, for a lawyer—"Why does your grandmother think I should want to see a lawyer?"

Diana turned her candid eyes on the older woman. "She hasn't said, but I suppose she means about the marriage settlements. Alec's family lawyer, and ours, are going to have a consultation with Uncle Michael and Major Fairbairn next week about my settlements."

"Oh, but *I* don't need . . . I mean I don't care about settlements."

"You don't care? But I expect that doesn't make any difference."

"You don't mean everybody over here has to have that sort of—?"

Well, Diana had been bridesmaid half a dozen times—"and tons of our relations are always being married." Out of her wide experience, she assured Camilla, "I never heard of *any*body who didn't have some sort of marriage settlement. Oh, we are there!"

. . . . . .

Another attractive old place, with unusually fine gardens and famous green-walled paths of close-clipped yews. Under the shelter of the fur rug Diana was still holding on quite tight to Camilla, as the motor drove round to the entrance in full sight of a party on the lawn. Alec, with a wave of his cap, advanced with immense strides on compass-like thin legs. His much older sister, freckled and severely tailor-made, followed more sedately but striding too. Contemplated from her Norfolk jacket upward to her high, bald forehead, Miss Phœbe Fairbairn made upon the beholder the impression of a curate. Behind Miss Phœbe, an elderly couple advanced with a lady between them, a tall, graceful person who might be thirty-two or three and might be more.

"Who's that?" Alice demanded under her breath, and then "Bless me!" as she stepped out of the motor, all animation. "In this *galère* of all places!"

Neither of the other occupants paid the least attention to Lady St. Amant's interest in the outsider. Also the brand-new preoccupation on the part of one of them about settlements was for the moment quite overtopped by sympathetic absorption in Diana. Camilla looked on with grave pleasure at the altogether satisfactory demeanour of "the principals"; Diana's form quite perfect, her happiness just touched with a shyness infinitely

engaging; Major Fairbairn, bluff, brick-red as to skin and sandy as to hair, with rather a bow-wow manner but evidently well-meaning, and entirely cordial; Mrs. Fairbairn's reception of the girl so kind and beaming, that Camilla was more than ever inclined to resent Alice's description of the lady: "Nearly as brick-red as her husband, and with . . . well, if you aren't good at arithmetic you won't know how many chins. Liberal allowance, anyway, and no allowance at all of neck." A feature which struck more forcibly the American eye, was the lady's hair. Straight and thin and grey, it was parted in the middle and slicked down each side with a rigour that obliterated all suggestion of separate strands, and lent to the scant locks the look of a fabric pasted over the top of the skull, and permitted to swell into a modest round pincushion low on the place which in another person would have been the neck. In Mrs. Fairbairn's case, merely the top vertebra of a spinal column strangely abbreviated.

When Mrs. Trenholme had in her turn been presented to the Fairbairns, she was conscious that the other member of the party, the lady whom Alice had so quickly appropriated, was coming forward with outstretched hands.

Camilla stared: "Why, Miss Mary!" she brought out, and then, "I m-mean—" she stammered.

"It *does* sound nice to be Miss Mary-ed again," said the lady with charming self-possession. "Thank you for that."

"So you know one another!"

"Yes, indeed," said the stranger pleasantly.

"Yes, indeed." Camilla's low echo preserved the note of pleasure, but sent it out charged with a suppressed excitement that made all the more marked her instant lapse into dumbness.

Alice made haste to pick up the ball of conversation which had fallen with such a thud.

"I saw in the *Times* that Sir Henry and Lady Macrae were back from—which of those little comic opera kingdoms is it?" Alice asked, and without waiting for an answer, "Somewhere in the Balkans, isn't it? I never can keep those quarrelsome little countries apart. Come now, can you? And how do you like being British Minister to semi-barbarians? Rather fun, I should think, especially for an American."

"An American!" Mrs. Fairbairn repeated, bringing her eyes back from the young people who were strolling with Miss Phœbe down the clipped yew path. Mrs. Fairbairn always forgot, she said, that Lady Macrae wasn't an Englishwoman. "We adopted her so long ago."

"Oh, come," the old Major remonstrated, as he led the way to the house, "not so long ago, but so completely."

"Yes, fairly long ago. Why, I've got two great boys at Eton," Lady Macrae turned to tell Camilla.

"You must have borrowed them!" said the Major with a barking laugh, ". . . like those women who sell matches. To touch the popular heart. Though why you should imagine you needed any adventitious aids . . ." and so on with a laboured gallantry that lasted them to the door.

The object of these manifestations accepted them with the good-humoured negligence of one well inured to this form of hospitality. As you looked at Lady Macrae a second time, you were surprised to discover how little claim she had to special good looks. An excellent example she was of the success with which your skilful and ambitious person may make an effect of beauty without a single good feature. Yet that was hardly fair. She had a remarkably graceful figure and a good voice, as well as some quality less easily verifiable which made men of the Major Fairbairn type feel disposed to talk to her in terms of compliment. Before the party reached

the drawing-room, Alice had discovered that the lady was only pretending to listen to her host. Her attention was riveted on her compatriot.

Alice, too, kept an eye on Camilla, wondering what on earth there was in this encounter to lend the calm face that look of suppressed excitement—a kind of quivering expectancy. "Shall you be staying long? Couldn't we meet?" she heard Camilla saying aside, with that new note in her voice.

Lady Macrae explained she had only come away for two days to see her husband's mother and to bring the Fairbairns news of their small grandson, recently arrived at the Legation. The Fairbairns' younger daughter, it appeared, was married to one of the secretaries "out there." And Lady Macrae's husband was expecting his wife back in London tomorrow.

"What a pity," said Alice. "You might have come over to us. And you and Camilla could have discussed International Marriage."

"Is that a subject of interest here?" Lady Macrae asked as the party gathered about the tea-table.

"Oh! hadn't you heard—!" Alice began, and broke off, not because of the general buzz and movement of settling into places. She had received the distinct impression that Camilla didn't wish the ground of interest in that particular phase of International Relations to be explained just yet to her old acquaintance. She had turned with a most un-Camilla-like air of forced vivacity to ask Lady Macrae some rather pointless question about the Balkans. Hardly waiting for the answer to that she inquired how long "Miss Mary" expected to be in London.

In the meanwhile Mrs. Fairbairn dispensed tea, and the Major dispensed his particular brew of cheer.

"Speaking of International Marriages," he beamed an impartial brick-red smile on both the aliens—"you

certainly have a great power of adaptability, you Americans."

"Especially you South-Americans," added Mrs. Fairbairn.

Lady Macrae made no rejoinder, but turned her smiling eyes significantly on her fellow-countrywoman.

"But we aren't South Americans," Camilla protested. She was recovering her self-possession, though, indeed, Alice alone had perceived that it was ever imperilled. The same shrewd vision noted the new "aliveness" that still was shining in the dark eyes. Whatever the cause had been, it existed still. But Camilla had herself well in hand now. "*Not* South Americans," she said firmly. "Americans from the Southern States."

"It's too fine a dstinction," Mrs. Fairbairn decided; and not even Mason and Dixon's forethought in providing a line, helped the definition of this boundary.

"And how well did you know Camilla?" Alice demanded. "I'm bound to tell you she's never talked about you."

"There may be more than one reason for that," was the cheerful retort. "Let me hope the main one is that I was more nearly a contemporary of Mrs. Trenholme's older sisters."

"Oh, you knew her *people!*" The tone argued surprise at discovering Camilla's "people" actually existed. Alice further elicited the fact that Mary Macrae's father had a winter place in the South, not very far from the scene of Camilla's childhood. "But I haven't been back for ages. It's melancholy, the way I've lost sight of everybody—living in the wilds as I do," Lady Macrae added tactfully. "In all this time just one little glimpse of your sister Julia as I was hurrying through Paris two or three years ago. And Lucy, with that big family of hers, is she—"

"Yes, still on the California ranch."

Lady Macrae turned and took in the listening tea-table. "Those sisters of Mrs. Trenholme's," she said, smiling, "were what we called 'belles' in the South. Very 'stylish and dashing'—wasn't that what we used to say?"

Camilla smiled too. "Well, it's true they put *me* completely in the shade."

"But they put everybody in the shade. The kind of girls, you know, who do everything and do it distractingly well. They were my despair."

"Me, too," said Camilla, blooming in this sun of family esteem.

Some of the qualities that made Mary Macrae a success as the wife of a diplomat were being made manifest.

Miss Phœbe had come in several moments before the young couple. The little pause, the slight awkwardness that followed their self-conscious entrance, was covered by Lady Macrae's anecdote about Camilla's sisters. The anecdote, not only with a delicate mercy shielded the lovers; it "presented" the sisters. Even more clearly it "presented" the person never named in these reminiscences, until the narrator turned as by an afterthought: "—and they used to try to bring you out, to cure you of your shyness."

Camilla shook her head. "Their way of doing it was to drive me further into my shell." Her lowered voice under the revival of talk at Diana's side of the tea-table, her attempted withdrawal of "Miss Mary" from the general conversation, sharpened Alice St. Amant's ears.

"Yes, your sisters seemed to me very great people in those days. They *were* great people. And couldn't they use their tongues?"

Camilla nodded. "So well, I nearly lost the use of mine. If I made a mistake they pounced. I was always making mistakes. Do you remember how they'd say, 'Isn't that just like Camilla?'"

Mary Macrae nodded as though revising some old conclusion. "So you lived in your shell."

"If a shell can live in the woods," Camilla agreed. And then with smiling eyes suddenly lifted: "Yes! like one of our gophers burrowing in the sand among the pines."

There was a sound of a motor car rushing up to the house. "My party come back for me, I should think. And indeed it's time." Lady Macrae looked at her watch and rose in the midst of a general protest.

"My brother'll bring 'em in here for tea," Major Fairbairn assured her that had been the understanding. Alice meanwhile, tea-cup in hand, had gone up to Lady Macrae. Camilla knew she was telling about the engagement. As Lady Macrae turned a smiling face towards Camilla, the door opened, and in came Sir John Fairbairn with two Americans. One, a mere thread of a man with a drooping, inky moustache and eyeglasses. The other a young Hercules, the sort of man who on first sight makes you blink at the spectacle of so much physical force vested in one human body. In a small room he would have been overpowering. Even here he gave you the impression that he ought to be kept out of doors, like those great Danes and dogs of the mastiff breed. The young man's chest, his vast shoulders (made even vaster by the American mode in tailoring) and his bull neck, gave him in Camilla's eyes the look of a prize-fighter, an impression not wholly corrected by his almost too regular features, inclining to the heavy aquiline. "Roman gladiator!" Alice whispered.

Lady Macrae had instantly directed her attention to her "party." "Well?" she said with animation, "and have you seen the famous stables?" She executed a little movement with the apparent motive of impressing "my party" that the moment of their return was what she had been living for. Then she redressed the balance by looking round on the others and saying wistfully: "What a pity it's so late and we've such a long drive back!"

But tea! They must have tea, the Fairbairns insisted, and Alec brought more chairs. However, the two very American Americans felt either too pressed for time, or too little interested in tea, to take the places made for them. They stood with cups in their hands, talking to the Major about the mighty fine brood mares and the polo ponies they'd been seeing over at Sir John's place.

Lady Macrae, drawing on her long gloves, listened as though few subjects in the universe interested her more profoundly than polo ponies and thoroughbreds.

Camilla listened too, conscious less of words than of the tonic quality in their American accent. It braced her like an east wind. "You can't go just yet!" With unusual initiative she took Lady Macrae into the window niche.

Once there the lady's faint reluctance for a *tête-à-tête* was amply atoned for.

"It's been delightful meeting you again," she said, smiling at Camilla. "And so you're going into a family English of the English!"

"Shall I do, I wonder?" Camilla asked with a suggestion of the long-ago little-girl attitude to the wise big girl. "They will expect a great deal."

"Oh, *you'll* do," the older woman smiled. "You are the kind. I?" she caught the silent counter-assertion, "Yes, I'm the kind, too. All this," she glanced round, "comes to us like second nature. When people like you and me come to England, we come home. Not that I'm saying our lots will be alike. In some ways," she said with her wise air, "yours will be the more exacting."

Camilla was sure that couldn't be so. "And a blessing, too. You are so much more fit for—"

"Oh, John will go far. I don't deny our job is the more showy. But the Macraes . . . ! mushrooms beside the oaks of Nancarrow."

"They've a pretty good opinion of themselves," Camilla said in a flash of revolt. More than any sign that

had yet escaped her, it betrayed the degree to which she was stirred, and lifted out of her usual equability. A kind of compunction for her speech seized her, under the steady scrutiny of the other woman. The thing she meant, Camilla protested, was "miles away from swagger and boasting."

"But *exactly!* They're far too proud to boast. They'd rather do the other thing. They—"

"Miss Mary," Camilla broke in, "what I—"

But Miss Mary was laughing gently at "these dear English!" and then hurried on as though with a fixed design to fill up the interval till she could decently detach her companions from their tea-cups. Moreover, she plainly meant to achieve this "filling up" without for a moment relinquishing the initiative to Camilla.

"These dear English," according to Sir John Macrae's wife, "go in for an ironic self-depreciation not a bit understood for what it is by other nations." As Camilla opened her lips—"Don't *you* notice that, Jerningham?"

The question turned the elder of the two Americans towards the niche.

Yes, "Miss Mary" had grown very foreign, Camilla said to herself. For while the lady explained the point under discussion, she seemed no more to think of introducing this attenuated Jerningham of hers to Mrs. Trenholme than she had of introducing the Roman gladiator. Jerningham, who had been much, it seemed, in England, agreed as to the root of your Englishman's self-depreciation. Pride, the queer English kind, that made them run themselves down in their own papers. "Why, I saw an article the other day in the leading Liberal organ. And what do you think the article was called?"

Camilla shook her head. Jerningham must have been pardoned had he gone away with the idea that his views possessed an extraordinary interest for the fair unknown. Yet scarce a syllable of what he said reached Camilla's consciousness. The voice—the voice! . . . it penetrated.

It called to her, and it repelled her. It played all kinds of tricks with impulse and with memory.

"The article was called 'Why we are Hated Abroad.' Now just imagine an American journalist treating such a theme seriously. Imagine an American paper printing it. Imagine anybody having the courage to admit that we ain't admired and beloved wherever we go. But the English! Why, they take a positive pleasure in admitting such facts—if they *are* the facts. Anyhow, inquiring dispassionately—" he caught some word about shire horses that whirled him round again as suddenly as he had been deflected.

Jerningham was lost to Lady Macrae. She glanced at the clock.

"What I wanted—" began Camilla.

"Oh! yes, the Nancarrows. I should say that the English as a race have a great feeling for personal dignity. A natural turn for it. Why"—again she forestalled something Camilla was about to say—"you see it even in their servants. And as to your Nancarrows—" she made a little gesture. Few of the reigning families of Europe were as old, she said. There had been Nancarrows at Nancarrow before there were kings of England. Yet again, as Camilla opened her lips, Lady Macrae delicately, adroitly, thrust a sugar-plum between them: "You know, of course, that your Michael Nancarrow's father—the man who did such splendid things in India, refused a peerage?"

"Did he?" said Camilla stolidly.

"More than once I've heard. How like them not to have told you!"

"I didn't get you away from the rest to talk about—people over here," Camilla brought out at last.

Lady Macrae made a decisive movement in the direction of her hostess. Camilla laid a hand on her arm. "You know," she persisted, "you know what, all this time, I've been wanting to ask you."

"Don't! At least," the other woman added gently, "I wouldn't if I were you. What does all that matter to you now?"

As Camilla lifted her appealing eyes, Alice St. Amant stood there. They must be going, too, she said.

During the cordial and somewhat protracted farewells between Alice and Lady Macrae, Camilla simply waited, still with that appealing look fixed on the face of her fellow-countrywoman, till all in a second the centre of Camilla's interest was quite plainly otherwhere. The Roman gladiator had turned to Jerningham and in that penetrating accent: "I've been wishing the whole afternoon that Leroy had been with us. Haven't you?"

"Why, of course," said Jerningham. "Friend of ours," he explained to Major Fairbairn. "Going to ship some of his own horses across. Means to keep a racing stud over here. That's why we were so glad to hear the views of an authority like Sir John."

"We'll have quite a lot to tell Leroy!" said the gladiator.

"Why not bring your friend over to me when he comes?"

The intensity of Camilla's listening!

With little cries of horror at the lateness of the hour, Lady Macrae swept her party out of the house.

. . . . . .

On the way home: "Did Mary Macrae know your husband?"

Camilla nodded. "She's his cousin."

CHAPTER XII

ALL that long drive home Camilla sat in excited silence, her dark eyes shining, no word out of her.

The dressing gong sounded as they drove up to the door. Michael and Mrs. Nancarrow on their way upstairs, turned back to hear about the visit.

"All right!" Alice said brusquely. And then, with no word about Diana or Fairbairns, "Lady Macrae there. Where's my—?" Standing with all her wraps on, she had been hungrily scanning the hall table. "Where's my—?" She faced about. "Hasn't a telegram come for me?" she demanded of the footman waiting to take her coat.

"No, m'lady."

"Very well then!" she said angrily, and slipped out of the heavy coat as out of a yoke. "Where's the new time-table?" She went upstairs with it in her hand.

Michael and his mother exchanged glances.

Mrs. Nancarrow followed Alice to her room.

"*You* are not going up!" The strong remonstrance in Michael's voice seemed to drive Camilla quicker to the stair. She was tired, she said. She made the ascent with a nervous energy not lost on the man watching her from below. He couldn't see how from the upper landing she ran down the corridor towards her room.

At dinner that night, though Nelly observed that the cough was worse, Alice showed herself sufficiently in spirits to give a humorous, and distinctly ill-humorous, account of their visit.

No great penetration was required to see that Camilla was not amused by Alice's travesty of the Roman gladiator and his friend. Early in the evening Michael suggested carrying Camilla off to the smoking-room. No,

she was so tired; she would ask them to let her go to bed.

He came out to light her candle. "What is it, dearest?" he said softly. "You're not feeling ill?"

No, oh no! "A tiring sort of visit?" She admitted that, but she was impatient for her candle. The hand she held out he bent to kiss. Her evasion was too skilful for him to be sure she had seen his intention. While he hesitated, Camilla had seized the candle and was halfway to the stair with "good night" over her shoulder. Oh! plainly she had been wounded.

"You mustn't mind Alice's nonsense," he said. "I ran across that Lady Macrae once. I thought her an awfully nice woman," he said, as though to redress the disturbed balance.

"I wish your mother knew her," was Camilla's answer from the first step. "She'd see the difference between Mary Sambourne Macrae and that Mrs—"

"Don't imagine my mother doesn't see the difference."

"You feel sure she does?"

"Absolutely. She looks at Mrs. Jardine as she'd look at a columbine in a Christmas pantomime. Tawdry-pretty, and endurable only because so very unreal."

"*That's* not why she endures Mrs. Jardine! She endures her for Alice's sake."

"Well—" he wouldn't deny there was that aspect. "My mother has endured a good deal for Alice's sake. Alice hasn't been the easiest of problems."

It was the nearest he'd ever come to discussing Alice. And he sheered off instantly. "Get a good sleep . . . something very important to talk to you about tomorrow."

She paused and threw a perturbed glance at him over the banister.

"*Darling!*" was all he said, but the face she looked down on wore such a radiance of love and faith, that all unaccountably the tears sprang to Camilla's eyes.

"Good night, Michael dear," she whispered, and went on up the stair.

. . . . . .

Camilla was not of those who lie awake. Such anxieties, sorrows, as she hitherto had had, she wore herself out with in the day. At night she slept.

"Part of Camilla's native tranquillity," her mother used to remark with the air of having conferred it.

"Sheer sound health," said her father robustly.

"It's nothing but being too stupid to keep awake," her sisters said.

That sleep came to her so soon and so profound, had been the very first of Leroy's grievances against her. When she showed astonishment at some opinion or plan of his—"Well, I *would* have told you, only you're always asleep." The saying came back to her that night after the Fairbairn visit. She found that she, too, could lie awake.

. . . . . .

She was up before her maid came in the next morning, but seldom in her life had she taken so long to dress.

The struggle of the night had changed its face by day. What was that "something" Michael was going to talk to her about? "Very important," he had said. A great dread of it, whatever it might be, possessed her—a dread that weighted her hands and made her feet leaden. Her maid reminded her how long ago the breakfast gong had sounded, and for her pains was told she wasn't wanted. Camilla sat at the dressing-table looking more at the clock's face than at her own, wondering at one moment how was she to go down and confront the day; wondering at the next how was it that she dared delay so long. After all, she tried to excuse herself, these people with their punctiliousness about not keeping dinner waiting, didn't seem to care what became of the breakfast.

At last a footman's voice outside, asking the maid if Mrs. Trenholme would like a tray upstairs.

But her tactics had succeeded. Only Mrs. Nancarrow left at the table, putting in the time by writing out various orders for cooks, chauffeurs, and what not. Michael, she reported, had been disturbed that he'd forgotten to tell Camilla about his being one of the judges for the prize-giving at a Cattle Show that morning—"there's a note on your plate."

The note said that he would do his judging double-quick, and the Devil would be in it if he wasn't back before luncheon. For the rest, the sort of note whose high temperature burns the pocket. But not just yet must she brace herself. Fate had given her the morning. "Alice . . . !"

Mrs. Nancarrow observed that she had not consulted her daughter, but just sent her breakfast upstairs. And this was the nearest approach made to expression of the anxiety that plainly possessed Alice's mother—unless the fact of her going off alone just before luncheon to meet Michael, and motoring up with him from the gates, could be construed in the same sense.

They were all, Alice among the rest, waiting in the hall, when the two came in.

Was she "all right again?" And behold, Michael's question was not meant for Alice but Camilla. Was she sure she was rested? No, he didn't believe she was. She'd been "overdoing" in his absence. Alice had walked her off her legs. No? Library all the morning! Then *that* was why.

He kept her there till the others had all gone in, talking tender nonsense and holding her fast by one wrist. Why wasn't she attending? Was *she* worried about Alice, too? Well, his mother had telephoned to Carlisle for the doctor. He would be due at about half-past two. The doctor wasn't on any account to see Alice till he had seen Mrs. Nancarrow. "Looks as if there's a conspiracy against you and me, doesn't it?" He gave

a more than half rueful laugh. "If it isn't one thing, it's another."

"Well, now it's luncheon," said Camilla.

She dawdled over the meal, waiting for the straws of conversation to show where, for her, the wind would blow keenest that afternoon; where she might with luck hope for some such shelter as she'd found all the morning, alone with silence and with books, beautiful and old. Vain hope, she was afraid. "Afraid?" Afraid of what? To put into words what she was afraid of, was what she was afraid of most of all.

Michael, with his eye on the clock, accused her of "only playing with that nectarine." Why shouldn't Alice and he take Camilla down to the Bray Brook, in view of the disgraceful fact he'd wormed out of her that she'd been frowsting indoors all morning.

Alice backed up the proposal. "You think it's far," she forestalled Camilla's possible objection. "It isn't a quarter of an hour—"

On the way they met Hatch—"Looking for you, sir!" —he touched his cap, and explained how Michael's favourite hunter had put her foot in a rabbit hole, and . . . well, looks like it's a bad business, and would Mr. Michael come?

Mr. Michael looked at Camilla.

"Alice might take me to see the alder cutting," she suggested.

. . . . . .

A strange walk. Both women fighting against a fierce inner preoccupation. They had talked to each other and to Michael until he left them. Now that he was gone neither seemed to feel the need to speak. On they walked, through the park, and down a silvery, sunless glade with no sound but the brush of footsteps and Alice's calling to the dogs. A perilous silence for Camilla, a silence through which the voices of yesterday shrilled loud. All these days, all these weeks, she had

held memory at bay. An achievement, some would say, possible only to the unimaginative. Yet in reality possible only to the super-sensitive, those of a susceptibility so delicately responsive that an eternal vigilance keeps guard against invasion; scenting danger from afar, putting such passion into watch and ward as will lift sentinelship to the plane of conscience, almost to the level of religion.

Now and then in these past weeks, in spite of this disciplined purpose, some shred of memory was unravelled. Quick and sure the instinct to tuck it out of sight, out of mind. No one better than Camilla knew that one little pull and out would come yards on yards, and the whole garment of decency, her *cache misère,* threatened to fall apart and leave her in shivering nakedness.

In face of such a danger, flight—and the safety that was Michael.

"It's a very English afternoon," she said at last, as they stood on the edge of the damp thicket to watch men binding faggots.

"I've seen sunsets here as fine as in the Alps," said Alice; and then, at her moodiest: "There'll be no sunset today." She sighed. "I used to think I'd never miss the sunset so long as I could go and look at the osier beds. Come, it isn't far."

As Camilla glanced at her watch, she heard the doctor's motor in the lower avenue. So did Alice.

"Some pestilential visitor! They think they'll catch us, coming at this outrageous time. Anybody who pays visits before three ought to be . . ." They could see the osier beds, she said, from the other side of the copse, and she drew Camilla along over dank, peaty soil.

"*Now* aren't you glad I made you come!" she triumphed as her companion made a little semi-articulate indrawing of breath at sight of the level and uniform fire that lit up the greyness yonder. A fire that burnt clear yellow near the ground, and mounted, shoulder-

high, through shades of orange into slender shoots of brightest vermilion. "It's like one of our prairie fires," said Camilla, "that flame burning low along the earth. Are you *sure* it's only . . . Osier is just wicker, isn't it?"

Alice nodded: "And would you think to see the cane of commerce—the *mannequins d'osier,* for instance, would you ever think the pale things went so gorgeous once? All the sunset *pickled out of them!*" she added as she turned fiercely away. "Like us when we've cried the colour out of our faces."

The only thing that was said on the way back, was Alice's sudden: "What shall we do this afternoon? We must *do* something."

And Camilla's "Yes, let us do something."

. . . . . .

Alice was astonished but not the least put out, to find who the "pestilential visitor" was. Anything, apparently, for a diversion. She told him that she'd called him a pestilential visitor. She flirted with him. Camilla turned away from the scene at the door, when half an hour later he took his leave.

Wormwood to Mrs. Nancarrow to see her daughter in this vein. The old woman's manner growing more distant, not to say icy, as Alice grew more provocative and the underbred little man more excited. "My daughter or I will let you know if any further advice seems necessary. Good-bye."

Flirted with him! Camilla repeated to herself, bewildered.

She was not enlightened by Alice's renewed interrogation of the hall table for the telegram that didn't come. "The Sunday trains seem as impossible as ever," she complained, pulling the time-table out of her pocket and throwing it down.

"Quite," said Mrs. Nancarrow as though this "impossibility" was in obedience to her command.

Alice looked at her watch. "There's this new Saturday evening train—"

"The doctor says—" began her mother.

"A fig for the doctor!" her cough seized her. "Sensible little man about one thing, though. Doesn't want to keep me indoors." She glanced through the open door.

"It's going to rain," said Mrs. Nancarrow.

Alice's face, darker than the weather.

Camilla marvelled that she had ever thought Mrs. Nancarrow an impatient person. The old woman stood, consulting the barometer, (Michael had said she never consulted "anybody else"). Quietly she proposed a compromise.

Would Alice take the motor (and promise to have it shut when the rain came on) and show Camilla the Howburgh Priory. They could leave cards—

No, Alice interrupted, her mother really must excuse her. She was going up to pack. But she'd like the motor, please, at seven o'clock.

"I am sorry, the motor won't be available at that hour."

"Very well. Then I'll *walk* to the station! And if it rains, everybody's happiness will be complete."

Her haste upstairs was impeded by a violent paroxysm of coughing. She clutched the banisters, the other hand at her chest. The shoulders raised, the whole slight frame racked, piteous. Mrs. Nancarrow turned away her eyes. Camilla hesitated an instant between the two, with an instinct that the cruel-sounding cough was sharper pain to the quiet breast than to the one convulsed.

In the midst of the paroxysm Michael came in from the stables, muddy and smelling strong of liniments. He held up his dirty hands for Camilla to see the state he was in. "Not a fracture. Only a bad sprain, I think. I won't be long changing." As he ran upstairs past

Alice she shot out a look that said plainly enough: "You care more for that brute than you do for your sister." Camilla went to her. Without speaking she put an arm round the thin shoulders.

"You mustn't mind. I get like this sometimes," Alice said wearily as they went up together.

"It worries your mother dreadfully."

"Well, it's no good . . ." Alice stopped again and leaned against the banisters, "not a bit of good your looking at me like that."

"Was I looking at you 'like that'?"

"Yes—as if it was my fault." She gave her chest a little beating with her fist as though she meant her cough. "*Why* do you look at me like that?"

"I suppose because I never saw you so out of sorts abroad."

"Well, you never saw me mewed up with one of my bronchial attacks and no letters—not a *sign* from Lionel for nearly a week—*c'est plus fort que moi.*" She went on again, frowning and flushed.

At the mention of the name, Camilla had looked anxiously up the stairs and down into the hall. No one in sight except Mrs. Nancarrow going heavy-footed towards the drawing-room.

Camilla overtook the ascending figure. "Can't you," she whispered, "can't you think about the children?"

"You know quite well the children don't need me. They've always cared more for their father." Alice went on faster, as if to escape some claim disallowed, but irksome.

"But, Alice, you—you love your children?" Camilla had caught her up on the landing.

"Of course!" said the other sharply. "But if I don't see Lionel for long stretches . . .! Oh, I telegraphed him yesterday!" She said it vindictively.

"'Long stretches!' Why, you saw him before you came up here."

"Nearly *three weeks!*" Alice stood an instant staring over the carved railing into the hall, as though looking back at Purgatory. "Three mortal weeks! After all, Lionel's only flesh and blood. Three weeks is too long—when Helen Croft is in town!" She went into her own room, and firmly shut the door.

Camilla stood for some moments, never moving from the spot where Alice had left her.

Michael . . . he would be expecting—

If she didn't go he'd be coming for her. She started violently as she heard her name. She looked up. No sign. Again "Camilla!" in the deep voice which she recognized, with a grateful sense of reprieve, was old. She ran down to Mrs. Nancarrow.

"The Daimler has been ordered," said the lady quietly, "on the chance." It would be at the door in a quarter of an hour. Perhaps if Camilla were to say that she wanted to go and see the Priory House, then maybe Alice might—

"I'd love to!" Camilla exclaimed. And then with an anxious air, Michael was waiting, she said. And so perhaps it had better be Nelly—

Nelly, Mrs. Nancarrow interrupted, was the best creature in the world. "But she—well, frankly, she bores Alice—I've noticed that you . . ." Mrs. Nancarrow broke off, but only to add something which pleased Camilla. "In Alice's state" (which she didn't particularize) Mrs. Nancarrow didn't know what they would have done, but for Camilla.

. . . . . .

With some trepidation she knocked at the door—with visions of Alice, flung face downward sobbing her heart out on the bed, or feverishly tossing things into her dressing-bag.

"Come in." Alice, a yellow-backed novel in her hand, smoking up the chimney! At sight of Camilla's face she burst into laughter. "What's the matter?"

"Do come," said the visitor with unrelaxed solemnity —"*do* come and show me something I shall like looking at."

Alice rocked with merriment. "Am I as plain as all that? *You,* anyway, are adorable, you kind creature!" She stroked the smooth cheek.

"Well," said Camilla, trying to hold steadfast to her purpose, by dint of thinking not of Alice at all, but of Alice's mother. "Perhaps *I* need a little being-kind-to."

Alice was sober in an instant. "You," she said significantly, "you want to get out of the house too?"

Camilla nodded and looked away.

"All right—I'll have to change. Ten minutes?"

"Ten minutes."

. . . . . .

She could go to him now. Camilla put on her hat, tied a motor veil securely over face and head, and went up to Michael's sitting-room.

CHAPTER XIII

NOBODY, she told herself, could be "very important" in ten—it was only seven minutes now.

She nearly ran into Michael as he came out of his dressing-room across the hall, in the act of putting on another coat.

In the suddenness of the encounter, *"Oh!"* says Camilla, never ready for an emergency; and upon that, by way of corrective to the small explosion (which not the most infatuate could mistake for pleasure) she struck the domestic note. "Did you call me?" she asked with the obedient-wife air.

"No. Why are you all tied up like that?"

"Oh, I thought you called me."

"Well," he turned to her in the act of shutting the sitting-room door, "not out loud; inside I'm always calling you."

She met that by telling him what his mother had been saying to her, and how in ten—in seven—no, in six minutes Alice would be expecting her.

"The devil take Alice and her six minutes! Are we slaves?" He had drawn off the long suede mousquetaire she was putting on with the one gloved hand. And now he lifted the bare wrist to his lips. Over it his eyes smiled at her. "No need to look so solemn about Alice. I'll tell you a family secret. Alice rather enjoys producing that graveyard cough. One of her most useful accomplishments."

"Michael!" she pulled her hand away. "How wicked of you!"

"Just what my mother thinks when I venture to hint . . . But that doesn't concern you and me. What I've been intending to point out is, that it's all very well for

you to make yourself popular with my family, but there *are* limits." He fumed good-naturedly. "Why, it's come to a point where you and I are positively grudged a quarter of an hour to ourselves. Can't have that!" He made as if to put her in the huge leather chair. She seemed to catch on the arm and perched there, half facing the back, where Michael presently leant, on folded arms. "We've got to have the best part of a morning *all to ourselves*—tomorrow?—to settle our affairs. Have you got a solicitor you trust?"

"No."

He laughed. "Sorry to see you so cynical—"

"I mean I don't know any lawyer over here. Is it necessary?"

"Oh! yes," he said in a cheerful commonplace tone. "There are marriage settlements, dower rights, and all that sort of thing to go into. Time's getting on." She was to write, he said, to her Embassy and ask them to recommend a solicitor. "We'll talk about that tomorrow. But there's one thing we mustn't wait any longer to decide."

"I'm sure Alice—"

He made her sit down again. "There's time for just this before you go." He leaned towards her over his folded arms, his eyes caressing the muffled figure. "It's been so glorious having you here, and watching you fitting in to it all, like a magic. I haven't wanted to say a word to break the spell. Not even to weave a greater one. But now—" he brought his face close to hers, "I can't wait any longer. No, not a minute."

"I don't know what you think can be done in a minute."

"Why, complete our plans." He knew by every indication, inward and outward, that this wasn't the best time. But he had been longing inexpressibly to share with her, and so be finally absolved from, the panic that had seized him that morning. While he lingered in the

hall after breakfast, waiting till the last possible moment in the hope of seeing Camilla before setting out for the cattle-judging, he had taken Whitaker out of the rack, where that notable kept company, year by year, with Bradshaw and the A. B. C. The legal notes on Marriage by Banns or Licence offered Michael nothing not known to him before. But over leaf, under *Miscellaneous*, this horrific paragraph caught his eye:

"A divorced person desiring to marry . . . &c. . . . must give notice to the Superintendent Registrar, to whom a copy of the divorce decree must be produced."

Michael Nancarrow would not soon forget that moment of dismay, in which he wondered whether Camilla had a copy of the divorce decree in England. He couldn't, even now, rid himself of the feeling that somehow she wasn't the person to go carrying such a document about the world with her. Suppose they had to send over the Atlantic for a copy. Weeks of delay—!

"There are regulations we have to comply with, you know, before we got our licence."

"Oh! the—the marriage licence." She stood up and began hurriedly putting on the confiscated glove.

He, too, straightened his tall figure; but even to arrest her, he hesitated to risk exploding the particular bombshell he had been nursing all day with concealed uneasiness. He drew her into the hollow of his arm. "I don't at all like you yashmaked into an Oriental." He made a little pull at the motor veil.

"No? well, listen then." Instead of beginning at once about the decree he led up to it by saying: "Tell me now, where do you want to be married?"

"Where?" Her mind flew back to that Sunday after her return. It seemed a long time ago. She had sat in the little church seeing in her mind's eye the centuries-long procession of Nancarrows coming here to be married, to be baptized, to be buried. And with a vividness that made her breath come quick and flying, she had

seen herself walking down the aisle on Michael's arm, his wife.

Why should he leave it to her to suggest—?

"Nelly tells me she was married here."

Michael looked at a loss for a moment, and then: "Oh! yes. You see, Nelly was an orphan. A ward in Chancery and no near relations."

Well, Camilla had no relations of any sort this side of the Atlantic, and she was an orphan too.

While she was thinking that, Michael came out with the very queerest question in the world. "Did you want to be married in church?"

She stared through the dusk of her veil. "Where else—?"

There was a difficulty, she heard, about being married in church. The English Church took an old-fashioned view of the re-marriage of—

"Surely," she broke in, "your Cousin Charles would arrange all that."

But it wasn't the easy matter to arrange that she seemed to think. Your Anglican was opposed to the re-marriage of divorced persons. So much opposed, that most of the clergy, Michael believed, and practically the whole bench of bishops, refused to lend the sanction of the Church. They declined to perform the ceremony.

"But they wouldn't forbid Cousin Charles's doing it; would they?" she said with childish pertinacity.

In a doubtful tone Michael said he understood that the decision was left to the conscience of the individual priest.

"Then that's all right."

He tugged at his moustache. He was afraid, he said, that as a matter of practice very few parsons, Michael himself didn't know of any—

Oh! she was quite sure that Mr. Heathcote—

Michael shook his head.

"But he has been so kind."

"I can't think," said Michael, with an air of amused impatience, "why in the world you *want* Charles."

"Because he—," she saved herself from saying: he married Nelly and is going to marry Diana. "He's your cousin. And he goes out of his way to be nice to me."

"Oh! yes, he'd go out of his way to be 'nice,' as you call it, to a person like you. But he'd stop jolly well short of risking his pleasant relations with his bishop."

She stuck to her point with the stubbornness that, in the past, had been other people's despair. Why need Mr. Heathcote "risk" anything? He had only to explain to the bishop—she stood twisting the slack of the glove round her wrist—"he need only tell him that *I* got the divorce."

"It wouldn't make any difference," Michael said gently.

"No *difference!*—between being innocent and being guilty?"

She heard that, in this particular, the Church doesn't recognize any distinction. "They say marriage is a sacrament—"

"But so do we, Michael, say that. And *we* mean it—" Quite suddenly she stopped.

He wondered at the stricken look which somehow the shadow of the motor veil intensified. How she took it to heart! His own ached to think he couldn't gratify this rather touching desire of hers to be married in Nancarrow Church. After a moment's reflection he adjured her in the well-worn phrase not to bother her head. He'd see. Not Charles. Charles was out of the question. But Michael was sure now that he'd heard that certain of the more progressive and enlightened clergy could be induced to go through the religious ceremony. If Camilla cared about it, he would make it his business to inquire who these innovators were. Probably some one could be found in London—if she wanted specially to be married in church. He repeated it!

And she too, on a less patient note: "How else *could* we be married?"

He forbore to tell her that the other was also probably the only way. For his part, he said, he felt there was much to be said for the civil marriage. But in any case the regulation notice had to be given. And there was that business about one of them being a resident in the district, *and,* he said with the haste now of undisguised anxiety, the Registrar would want to see a copy—

"*Registrar!*" she interrupted. "You aren't thinking of our being married at a Registry Office?" And she saw, to her stupefaction, that was precisely what he had been thinking of. For Nelly, Diana, *any*body else, the beauty and dignity of Nancarrow Church. For her . . . "A Registry Office!" she repeated. "I should feel as if I were engaging a cook!" A motor veil wasn't enough. She turned her back to hide her humiliation.

Alice! calling as she came along the corridor. Michael's low, beseeching "Dearest!" was in Camilla's ears, but it was Alice who was answered.

"I'm ready!" She fled out of the room without looking back.

. . . . . .

Alice and she had been flying along for ten minutes or so when Camilla said suddenly, "Is *this* the way to—?"

"No. I can't be bothered with mouldy Priories today. Let's go and call on your friends."

"My friends?"

"Yes. Tomlinson. Why not? Must be civil. We'll leave cards."

But though the ladies were out, Lord Glendower was in, and Alice didn't seem to mind whether it was a doctor or a law-lord who helped her to pass the leaden hours. Camilla with heavy heart remembered Mrs. Nancarrow's phrase: "Alice's spirit of social adventure."

Lord Glendower, to Alice's wicked amusement, had, as she said, set up an aristocratic ailment with the same

thoroughness as he set up a castle. They found him in his baronial hall, one foot booted, one in a felt slipper propped on a cushion—as delighted as Lady St. Amant herself at the prospect of a diversion.

He got his diversion.

Alice had dropped her glooms. She sparkled and laughed and paid outrageous compliments to "old Tomlinson," till a neighbour came in bringing a guest, who quite took the wind out of the Tomlinson sails. The neighbour himself would never have been guilty of such a misdemeanour—a taciturn, middle-aged landowner, well-known, seldom seen and still seldomer heard. But the man he brought along with him was Mr. Percival Kennedy.

"What! not Percival Kennedy the novelist?" Alice wrung the long limp hand. She turned her batteries on the dazzled gentleman, and turned her back on old Tomlinson.

"I've read every line you ever wrote. Your *Katherine Mayo*—I'm never *without Katherine Mayo*. Shall I confess? I've had a pocket made in my travelling bag. Wherever I go, *Katherine Mayo* goes."

"Really?" As he sat askew, with his high narrow head very much on one side, Mr. Kennedy's speaking countenance proclaimed: This is a most attractive woman!

The old-looking young man's attitude was not altogether a tribute to the "attractiveness" of Lady St. Amant. He needed no such magnet to draw him, so to speak, out of the perpendicular, as you saw from the fact that his entire exiguous body followed the same tendency, from the slightly lifted right shoulder to the slightly sagged left. All the same, in the gale of flattery that beat about his head the poor gentleman had need of some device to aid him in keeping his moorings. So he twined his legs firmly round Lord Glendower's mediaeval chair and did his best to preserve an appear-

ance of being used to "this sort of thing." To that end he was much concerned to keep the loose mouth from too ecstatic smiling. Also to keep his eyeglasses on his nose. Their security seemed to be intimately connected with the sobriety of the wearer. In spite of heroic struggles, Mr. Kennedy could not help breaking into spasmodic smiles with *"Really?"* "That's very kind of you!" and off would jump the *pince-nez*. He would stick them on again with: "I had no idea that another mind than my own would so surely grasp—*Really?*" and away the *pince-nez* would toboggan down the sheer declivity of nose, do a flying leap over the jutting chin, to be received in mid air yet again, with a nervous jump and clutch. In spite of an unusual amount of this, his only form, you would say, of physical exercise, Kennedy was clearly enraptured with the game instituted by the attractive woman. She herself scarcely less so. Camilla and the taciturn neighbour entirely content to look on. Only old Glendower sat scowling. Soon he began to fidget ominously. Now he was drumming with his blunt fingers, on the oak arm of his chair. Lady St. Amant, irradiating that delight with which the signs of human foible never failed to inspire her, paused an instant in the full tide of unblushing eulogium—excessive, had the object been Balzac, Tolstoi and Meredith rolled in one. She turned upon her scowling host: "I'm sure you agree with me, Lord Glendower."

"I'm sure I don't!" the old man rapped out with decision. "I don't like books that make light of the foundations of civilized society."

"And what," Lady St. Amant asked in her most sugary accent, "what is the foundation of civilized society?"

"The institution of marriage." In the pause he drummed with greater emphasis. Those books Lady St. Amant had been praising—he was forced to the conclu-

sion that she had not paid them the compliment of much attention.

"Oh, Lord Glendower!" she remonstrated. "Haven't you just heard me say—"

"Yes," he said significantly, he'd heard. As for himself, he was happy to say he'd never really read but one of Kennedy's works.

It was curious to see how Glendower's attack steadied the object of it. Suddenly turned out of the forcing house of Lady St. Amant's flattery, Kennedy became an alert, reasonable human being. When the lady presumed to remonstrate with Glendower for his "lack of literary appreciation"—a charge that particularly infuriated the purchaser of the famous Southwick Library—Kennedy flew to the rescue. "No, no, Lady St. Amant! I am very much interested in the new point of view. We writers too seldom hear the opinion of a man like Lord Glendower."

"All the same, you mustn't forget—" Lady St. Amant shook her feathers at old Tomlinson. "Think who it is!"

"What d'you mean?" the host demanded, working his bushy eyebrows up and down.

"Why," said Alice with pious reverence, "it's Percival Kennedy!"

"Oh, it is! Well, I knew his father before him. His *father* was a very decent fellow."

Kennedy saved the situation by letting his mouth go all lengths and abandoning himself to uproarious laughter. At this unseemly demonstration, joyously abetted by Alice, Lord Glendower appeared to struggle with a desire to clear the court. He waited grimly. When order was restored, he remarked in his most judicial Divorce Court style: "It's a reason the more for plain speaking to the son—"

"No, no! you've got to be converted," said the lady with her wilful air. "We can't have you not liking Mr.

Kennedy's beautiful books just because—" She looked round on the company: "Let me see, why was it?"

"Because they're licentious!" said Glendower in a voice that echoed from corbel and rafter.

In the startled pause that ensued the great lawyer resumed his indignant drumming.

But Percival Kennedy was smiling again. As he recovered his eyeglasses he said aside to Lady St. Amant: "The Lord hath delivered him into mine hand." He turned round and hung his head in Glendower's direction. "I can only assure you that your lordship, more than any one in the world, is responsible for the book you are pleased to condemn. You are the spiritual father of *Katherine Mayo.*"

Glendower looked as if, but for maintaining the validity of his gout, he would have risen in his vigorous age and pitched the exiguous young man out of the nearest mullion, clean over the castle wall.

"Lord Glendower," the novelist went on, addressing himself to the ladies, "Lord Glendower said in my hearing some four or five years ago, that his occupation (in the Divorce Court, you know)—his occupation would be gone if it were not for two things. You remember?" he challenged the old man.

A glare for all response.

"*You'd* have to shut up shop, you said, if it wasn't for drink in the lower class and music in the upper." He waited.

Glendower did not disavow the saying. He evidently thought it rather good.

"Well—?"

Kennedy waved his long hands. "Whereupon I went home and wrote *Katherine Mayo.*" He leaned back in his mediaeval chair with a satisfied smile.

"And had the unparalleled impudence to send the book to me! Now perhaps you'll tell the company what I wrote you in return."

"I *wish* I could! If I'd guessed what an interesting visit I was going to have this afternoon, I would have brought it along. What I do remember," he confided to the company, "is that it . . . it stimulated me."

While the furious old man was trying to find something that was possible to say before a parcel of women, Kennedy dared to observe that he should never forget—never—what he owed to Lord Glendower.

Alice sat beaming—at the shrewd elation on Percival Kennedy's face; at the dour agitation of the friend who had brought him; at Glendower, working his eyebrows up and down and swallowing retorts unfit for promulgation. Only Camilla, absent, thoughtful. Alice's look swept past Camilla to Percival Kennedy's host, and then returned to her new ally. "You and I," she seemed to say, "each have a dumb friend. But you've touched yours up." An incorrigible desire to do the same by hers seized the successful tactician. "Now, Camilla! why aren't you standing up for the institutions of your country?" she demanded.

Camilla stared with that air of being called from a great distance: "What institutions?" she asked.

"Why, Divorce. Isn't it the corner-stone of American Society?"

"Stone?" said the novelist, rising with his friend upon a signal. "Stone? Nothing so static. Divorce in America is the millionaire's merry-go-round. But with us in England it still, thank God, carries a weight of odium—the stuff of Tragedy."

. . . . . .

Though she had no reason to believe him to be outdoors, all the way up the avenue to the very threshold of Nancarrow, Camilla kept looking out for him. "Michael! Michael!" her heart was crying, "I'm hurt—I'm unhappy! Michael! Michael!" Inside the house, she slipped off her coat into the first pair of waiting hands, and with her loosened veil floating behind her,

she went to the drawing-room and softly opened the door.

Mrs. Nancarrow, rather forbidding-looking, sat alone reading the *Times*.

Camilla closed the door, and sped down the corridor to the smoking-room. Yes! She could smell his cigar. Wicked Michael, to forget to shut the door tight! "Michael!" She stopped short on the threshold, staring at the solitary occupant of the room.

It wasn't Michael.

It was Lionel Harborough.

All the embarrassment of the meeting was Camilla's own. Perfectly he masked his disappointment at seeing who it was. He came forward with that inimitable grace of his, a smile on the ugly, fascinating face; cheerful; cordial; at peace, you would say, with all mankind.

"You brought Alice back with you?"

Before Camilla could answer she heard steps hurrying. She murmured some excuse and went out.

Alice flew past her.

Her face of joy!

CHAPTER XIV

THEY made up two bridge tables after dinner. Mrs. Nancarrow, Blanche, Michael and Camilla at one. At the other Alice—the Alice of Lugano, and if she coughed more than once Camilla did not hear her—Alice and Lord Harborough played Nelly and Cousin Charles. Camilla's eyes nearly as often travelled from Lord Harborough to the Reverend Charles, as from card to card. Mrs. Nancarrow shook her lace lappets at such playing. No one appeared the least distrait except Camilla. Lord Harborough, particularly at his ease, seemed to be making himself immensely popular with Charles Heathcote.

A feeling of indignant sympathy for these people seized Camilla at sight of hospitality abused and mocked.

. . . . . .

She followed Alice to her room and shut the door.

"He won't stay, I suppose?"

"Why shouldn't he stay?" Alice asked, falling back again to sharpness.

Camilla sat down unbidden and looked into the fire. Where would Alice's unhappy passion lead her? That strain of recklessness in her, which Camilla saw now as the root of the maternal fear, root of the forbearance too, was it going to carry Alice over the edge? If Alice . . . why, then, what could save these people, so close-knit that what happened to one happened to all of them? Michael! He had shown what the scandal would be to him by his efforts to avert it, travelling day and night to Switzerland for the sole purpose, as Camilla knew now, of preventing an encounter between two men and a lady all bound for the same place—Alice, her lover and her husband. And Alice's child—poor little Diana!

To have the knowledge come crashing down at this moment, of all times in her life!

"Oh, Alice," she prayed, "*do* send him away! You can't keep things. They'll suspect."

Alice opened her eyes as at some new idea. "The children? Not they. They're accustomed to him."

Accustomed! "Then it's true he's been here before?"

"Why not?"

"I thought I must have misunderstood." Alice stood looking at her with a critical coldness that drove Camilla to add, "I didn't believe you *could* have asked him here since—after—" She suddenly clasped her hands. "If it was me, I shouldn't be able to sleep at night for fear your mother might suspect—"

Alice laughed suddenly. It was an odd sort of laugh.

Camilla sat with lips that parted before she spoke. "You don't mean she suspects already?"

"My dear child, *she* isn't a goose, like you."

"You can never mean she knows!"

"Oh, we don't go dotting i's and crossing t's, if that's what you mean."

Mrs. Nancarrow knew!

Camilla's world was spinning like a top.

"As long," Alice said, "as a man can keep his wife from making a fuss, *other* people"—she dropped down a warning look—"other people can put up with it."

"Your mother can put up with it!" she breathed out the incredible.

"Oh! as to my mother, she isn't obliged to condone what's never been put into words. And *she can't help it, you see!*" The hard gleam in Alice's eyes shed a crude light on old Mrs. Nancarrow's problem. "It isn't ideal, but it's better than a scandal."

"Is it?"

"Why, of course it is, you silly! Anyway, for people like us. Then too,"—her hardness had vanished, whether disarmed at the spectacle of Camilla's *naïveté*,

or at the sudden envisagement of an ampler field for whimsical observation, where yet graver figures cut their antics to Alice's malicious delight. She glanced at a communicating door, and lowered her voice. "They've always hoped that if they were patient, I'd get over it. Or *he* would. Meanwhile"—she turned airily to the mantelpiece and found a cigarette case—"meanwhile we're very decent about it, Lionel and I."

"Decent!" Camilla breathed.

Alice faced about with an impish smile only kept from open laughter by the need to hold a cigarette in the corner of her mouth while she lit the match. "Have you forgotten our *dame de compagnie*? *Don't* say you've forgotten the Blood of my heart. She adored you. She adored *me* before she went travelling with me. I couldn't think why she was ready to come again."

"Poverty, poor soul!" said Camilla, looking as burdened as Miss Blood.

"Not only poverty. Not chiefly poverty. And only partly to see Switzerland. Oh, life's richer than you think! It hadn't occurred to you that Blood's an authoress! Or, as she said in the early days when she used to confide, 'I *would* be an authoress if only I'd ever seen anything of life!' You hadn't realized, had you, that when she sat on the back seat with the bags, Blood was 'seeing life'?" Alice pealed her laughter. She took fresh breath to ask: "Didn't you notice her taking notes in the Coffee Room, too? Oh! *you're* in a lot of them! Told me so! You see, she'd *done* us, as the erring aristocrats, so often, Lionel and I were rather *vieux jeu*. You—the beautiful, mysterious stranger! were a perfect godsend to poor old Blood."

Camilla stood up. No one coming in at that moment would have detected the least sign of emotion on her face; but the other woman knew it too well not to realize that Camilla had been made more profoundly miserable by Alice's fun than by her earnest. And now a tone-

less "good night" as she moved away to the door.

Alice made a dive and took her by the shoulders—made her face the firelight. "Why are you like this? Why not give us the credit we deserve? You see only what we've taken, you don't think of all we've given up."

"You gave up . . . ?" The imploring hopefulness that dawned in Camilla's eyes, made Alice hasten quickly over this place where the ice wouldn't bear over-much weight. "I'm not saying we're a pair of plaster saints, Lionel and I, but we never forgot we had the others to consider."

"The others?"

"Well, of *course!*" Alice released her hold, and sat down suddenly as though revolted that Camilla should have forgotten "the others." "I've got my children to think about. And Lionel's got his wife to consider."

Camilla looked at her. "Yes," she said slowly, "we *are* simpler in America." Then she turned her head and gazed into the fire a moment. "I think I'll go back," she said.

"Back?" Alice sat up very straight. "To Queen Anne's Gate? Trousseau? Shall I come along and help? I'm rather good at—"

"I didn't mean Queen Anne's Gate."

"You never meant—!" Alice was on her feet, her face aghast.

"What if I did?"

The door was opened shyly. Peggy's face looked in. "Mummy, may I come—?"

"Certainly not! What are you doing out of bed at this—"

"*I* can't stay," said Camilla firmly, and she was swift to gain the corridor. Looking back, she saw Alice coming in pursuit, hampered by the little dressing-gowned figure, and losing patience. On a sudden impulse Ca-

milla knocked at Nelly's door. Yes, she would like to come in and sit by the fire a while, if she might. A last look through Nelly's door showed Peggy clinging to her mother's arm.

"I had a bad dream, Mummy, that's why."

. . . . . .

Camilla breakfasted in her own room. A note from Michael on the tray, very dear and gentle. He was waiting for her. She did not appear till the church-going contingent gathered in the hall—Mrs. Nancarrow, Nelly, Miss Colby, and all the young people except Diana, who was at the Fairbairns', and Tony, who had gone back to Rugby.

Michael and Lord Harborough stood smoking in the sunshine, just outside the door, secure in that singular dispensation which permits Englishmen to remain away from Church without loss of public regard, or even of the parson's, provided the gentleman's family are seen in the "family" pew. In this connection the family is held to be adequately represented by the feminine portion.

The moment he caught sight of Camilla, Michael threw away his cigar and came in. His "good morning" finished with his taking up the end of her scarf, of palest rose-colour, which today lit up the eternal black or white.

"Where did you get this?"

"Don't you like it?" she said, looking down at the deeply fringed end he was holding.

"Most particularly. Never saw you wear anything I liked so much."

Alice had joined in, too, with "It's quite lovely! Canton *crêpe*, isn't it? You must tell us where you got it. Shall you mind if I'm a copy cat and have one too?"

"I wouldn't," Michael advised her. "That colour wouldn't suit you."

"Why not—you who 'never notice what anybody has on'?"

"I don't know," he smiled, "but I wouldn't try it, if I were you."

"It's too delicate. Michael's right," said Mrs. Nancarrow. "Something more decided suits you better."

"You're all wrong, and I'll prove it. Tell me instantly, Camilla, where did you get that ravishing thing?"

"Oh, I've had it for ages! It was part of my—" She closed the hiatus with haste and the information: "My mother gave it to me."

"You are going to stay and talk to me?" Michael said.

Camilla showed her prayer-book.

"Very well, then I'll come too." He spoke pleasantly enough, but Camilla winced inwardly with a renewed sense of his disappointment in her—a disappointment, she told herself (pride topping her remorse), that he was bearing like—well, like the gentleman he was.

Alice had protested too, but *sotto voce,* at sight of Camilla's prayer-book. She left Lord Harborough smoking all alone at the front door and walked with the others nearly as far as the church. But Michael never left Camilla's side, till they reached the lych gate. There was only time for Alice to whisper: "Don't go doing something rash. Above all, don't speak to anybody about—you know what—till I see you. Arrange to come up to my sitting-room after luncheon—"

"The bell's stopped," Michael came back to say.

. . . . . .

At last she was safe in the Nancarrow pew, safe for a whole hour—standing up, sitting down, kneeling, nobody could speak to her. She could think her own thoughts, pray her own prayers—"Help me, O God, to help Alice! Whatever's going to happen, let me do that much for

Michael! Oh, help me, God, to find the right way! The right words!"

All during the sermon she was going through an imaginary scene with Alice. Perhaps, she thought with unconscious profundity, perhaps Alice will listen to things from me she wouldn't allow a cleverer person to say. Though I'm not so dull *really*.

(Leroy had been right about that. "Your mind," he said, "is like your face; it hasn't any mobility, no ease in expression.")

It's not that I can't think, or don't see. But there was that shy dumbness—

She could sit here in the Nancarrow pew and imagine herself speaking out, delivering her soul. Yes, imagine it. But could she ever actually say to Alice, "You think you've 'considered the family' by sparing them a public scandal? No, you've not spared them. What did it mean if you and your mother between you induced Michael to go abroad to be your shield? If you coughed and fretted your mother into telephoning Harborough to 'come and shoot' . . . was *that* sparing the family? Or wasn't it rather coercing their affection to share your frailty?" (The phrases came to her as she knelt, like an answer to prayer.) "You are a burden on their house!" she heard herself saying. "More than ever a burden when you try to lift it from them. A shame to them, when you lay the weight of your transgressing on outside friends—making my house a place of assignation! That's hardest of all for them."

A consuming desire to help possessed her. Oh, her dulness should serve her for once! It should be her cloak. From under it she would deal shrewd thrusts.

The custom was (and how quickly, where strong feeling exists, is a custom forged!) that Michael and Camilla should walk in Nancarrow wood after the morning service. He waited, for once not very patiently, as the children hung about her skirts.

On the way out of church she had covertly encouraged them: "Each one has a garden! Where is yours? I'll give a prize for the garden I like best." And so: "No, no, Uncle Michael! she's got to come, first of all, with us." They stuck like leeches up to the moment the luncheon gong sounded.

Afterwards, before Camilla had finished her coffee, there was Alice saying firmly: "Whatever anybody may say, I'm going to carry you off." She laughed her teasing laugh at sight of her brother's face. "Only for half an hour."

"Oh! as long as you please," said Michael, past protesting now. He seized a cap, pulled out a walking-stick and made off in the direction of the stables.

. . . . . .

Alice shot the bolt in her bedroom door and drew two chairs to the fire. "Now, darling Camilla, first of all we don't really need to talk any more, *do* we, about that foolishness—that wanting to go away?"

"No," said Camilla, "we don't need talk about that."

Alice eyed her shrewdly. "Does that mean you've given it up?" In the silence a sudden agitation came into the piquant face. "I should never forgive myself if taking you into my confidence had done the very smallest injury to Michael. He's been . . . I should never be able to tell you what a brick Michael's been."

"If he *has*," Camilla began with a beating heart, "isn't that—the best of all reasons for—for not putting any more strain on him? Nor on his mother?" There was a queer humming in her ears which prevented her from rightly attending to what she was saying—or more truly, reciting—those phrases conned during litany and collect, and given out now, halting, unhappy, so much more like a confession of her own guilt than like arraignment of another. Small wonder Alice quite failed at first to catch the drift. Oh! yes, Camilla saw she was doing it badly, for all her prayer and preparation. But

she must go through with it. "I'm not blaming you entirely, because . . . because you don't know the harm you're doing to them. I'm not sure there isn't something . . . awful in your not knowing. It means . . . deadness—"

As the words found their difficult utterance, Alice, more and more intensely observant, noticed the faint shining on Camilla's skin, little points of light as if silver dust had been finely sprinkled there—a dew of anguish as she spoke of "their sacrifices" and the hurt to Michael's pride.

"You think *I* . . ." interrupted Alice, staring out of eyes as innocent-looking as a child's. "How have I hurt Michael's pride?"

"By hurting your own." Deceit had begun the mischief, Camilla went on dully, in the teeth of her failure. "You take easily now to shifts. You don't mind things you used to mind. Isn't that so?"

Alice sat agape. If a cooing dove had suddenly darted out an adder tongue and stung her, Alice could not have been taken more unawares.

"The worst of it is," the low voice went on, "you are all so welded together, you weren't able to hurt yourself without hurting them. Oh, Alice, give him up!"

Stupefaction still held Alice tongue-tied for an instant.

"I'd do *any*thing, anything in the world for you, if you'd give up Lord Harborough."

Lady St. Amant leaned back, clutching the arms of the chair with her jewelled fingers, and the dawning indignation in her face changed on a sudden to something like contempt. "I'm to understand that you don't approve of my meetings with Lionel Harborough? My brother invites him. My mother receives him. But you *—you—!!*" she flung out her hands suddenly and let them drop in her lap, "What's the use of talking to you?"

Camilla tried to speak.

"What do you know about such things?" Alice hurled the question at the other's head with a nervous force that half startled Camilla out of her chair. "As if to the day of your death you'd *ever* understand anything about it!" This reflection seemed to calm Alice's rising wrath. She dropped back in her chair with a little reconciling gesture. "And that's all right," she added in the tone of enforced reasonableness—the meticulous tone one uses to the sick or the immature. "That's all right for you—is a kind of charm in itself. Only," her blue eyes blazed, "it doesn't fit you for judging—others. *You!*" she burst out afresh, "with your poor little puny preferences, your safe little surface emotions—what do *you* know about passion?"

It was Camilla's turn to sit astonished into silence by the unexpectedness of what she'd brought down on her head. But her very stillness seemed to infuriate Alice the more.

"Oh, I've watched you, and I don't mind telling you I've been sorry for Michael!"

"You are sorry for Michael! Why are you sorry for Michael?"

"Because," Alice sprang up as she delivered her soul, "Michael's a human being and he'll be tied to a fish!"

But even that elicited no sign from the motionless figure opposite, beyond a lowering of the eyes.

"Who could help seeing?" demanded Alice, "Michael hungry for a little—a little of the Real Thing, and you—! Poor old Michael! And now I'll just tell you something else. I warned him. Oh, don't think *I* didn't know! That was why I never told you much about Lionel. I soon saw you'd have been frightened out of your wits at such daring. Anyway, you wouldn't understand, not if you lived to be a thousand. I put a gay face on it. Lionel too. It's our way. But if you think it's always been easy—" She broke off with a repetition of the word *"Easy!"* and a laugh that made

Camilla shrink, "I can tell you there've been times when—if it wasn't very comfortable for others, it's been hellish for us." She drew her handkerchief across her trembling lips. "Don't you know," she demanded suddenly, "haven't you guessed *why* my people here, and his down in Kent, have made the best of it? Because they knew if they didn't, we'd pay *any* price for what we meant to have. People like you—you draw back appalled at just a glimpse into the deeps. *We* were ready to throw ourselves in. We *did* throw ourselves in. Our life has been a glorious miracle! Lionel and I"—she lifted a face glowing—"we've gone through fire for each other. And when people are prepared to do that—fire itself can't scorch them." She turned away to the window, shaking with excitement.

For all the time she stood there not a sound from the chair where Camilla sat, as motionless as if she'd been part of the pattern on the chintz.

By and by Alice blew her nose with decision and thoroughness. "See here, Camilla!" she came behind the chair, "if you've got a heart the size of one of your peanuts, don't go punishing poor old Michael for my sins."

Some one tried the door—rattled the knob.

"Alice!" Mrs. Nancarrow called, "have you got Camilla in there?"

When the door was opened the old lady looked suspiciously from one to the other. But all she said was "I think, Michael—"

"Yes, yes," said Camilla hurriedly.

They all went down together.

CHAPTER XV

IN the hall the rest of the feminine portion of the family, driven indoors by the shower and still wearing hats and scarfs, were gathered round a table. Blanche and Marjory had got out some old albums and were making merry over family photographs.

"Come and look at pictures of us all the summer we spent at the Lakes," Marjory called out as Camilla appeared. "They're the first snapshots I ever did by myself."

Camilla thought the pictures good. "I've never seen the English lakes," she said.

"If you came round here and looked at my album," said Blanche, "you'd see much more exciting things than lakes."

Marjory discouraged this exchange. "Only pictures of us when we were small."

"Oh! and when we were great too," her mother struck in, on the emergence of Michael and Lord Harborough from the smoking-room. "In our Court gowns. *Really,* Nelly, what you look like! Do come and see Nelly being regal."

Lord Harborough followed her lead, even Michael looked over Banche's head and smiled. Alice told about a diverting little *contretemps,* beginning: "the first time I was presented," while secretly she thanked God for Camilla Trenholme's impassive face. If she couldn't, like Alice herself, laugh and be gayer than common after such an interchange as had taken place upstairs, Camilla could at least look "as dull as usual," in Alice's unsparing phrase. The truth was, Alice was a good deal frightened at what she'd been astonished into saying to Camilla. And so she rattled away as though she hadn't

a care. Her reminiscence called forth others. Even Blanche revelled in a description of her fearful agitations in timing properly her Court curtsey. "Did *your* legs shake like that," she said to Camilla, "when you were presented?"

"I haven't been presented."

"Haven't been presented?"

"No."

"But heaps of Americans *are.*" Her mother tried to stop her. But Blanche was feeling the customs of her country slighted in Camilla's omission. "Don't you care about it?"

"*They* don't care about it," said Camilla steadily; "they won't have a divorced woman at Court."

There was a moment of painful silence, the younger people making up, by their round-eyed staring, for explicit avoidance on the part of older eyes. Alice was as uncomfortable as anybody at Camilla's lapse—coming, as it did, on top of the agitations upstairs. Before the children, too! Really these Americans—you never knew where you had them.

But you always knew where you had Alice St. Amant. She would always be the first to recover self-possession. She dashed now into the yawning silence with an account of what happened the second—"or was it the third time?"—she went to Court. "Must have been the third, because it was in the worst days of hobble skirts" . . . and so on.

Lord Harborough, too, had his serviceable little story. How he'd forgotten his card the day he went to kiss hands on some minor appointment. Under cover of the rather feeble laughter at the account of his frantic shifts to repair the oversight, Alice tried to attract Michael's attention. When she failed to catch his eye, she made bold to intercept him in his détour round table and chairs to Camilla's side.

Michael so little understood what was good for him,

that he disregarded Alice's signs. Yet if he didn't walk warily now . . . !! Alice bit her lip with vexation at her failure to have a private word with him before he should have a chance to talk to Camilla. But when that brother of hers made up his mind, you might as well talk to a steam-roller while it was passing over your prostrate form.

Deliberately he had waited. There was nothing he wanted less than to give himself the air of flying to aid the distressed. For himself, profoundly as he sympathized with Camilla, he felt that he was nearer recovery of his confident happiness at this moment of strain, than he'd been since she and Alice came back from the Fairbairn visit. These two days' bewilderment at her studied avoidance of him, his wounded surprise at her rebuffs and odd behaviour generally—all that vanished in the light that showed him her soreness at the English view of divorce. He could understand now her longing for the special sanction of Nancarrow Church—oh! he could understand many things. His heart went out to her in a rush of protecting sympathy. He brushed Alice aside with small ceremony and went round to where Camilla stood, still looking over the Ambleside pictures. "What a pity it's raining!" Michael, who was chary of demonstrations "before faces," slipped his hand through her arm. "All the same, if you put on a Burberry, wouldn't it do you good to come out for a turn? It would do *me* all the good in the world!"

"Tea'll be here in five minutes," said Alice. It wasn't true, yet it served.

Michael walked Camilla to the farther window. "What is it, my darling?"

She was silent for a moment, and then: "Those lake pictures . . . I've been thinking I'd like to go to the Lakes for a few days."

He evidently debated something to a swift conclusion. "All right. Shall we take Blanche or—"

"No, no! I mean alone."

"How could we go alone unless . . ." He revolved the possibilities of the special licence.

"What I meant . . . I would like to go by myself—"

"By yourself!"

"Or just with Nelly and the babies. I think if I asked her, Nelly would come. Or she'll lend me little Michael."

"She won't lend little Michael, and I won't lend *you*. Darling—"

She left him at the window and went back to Marjory.

He stood there looking out at the rain, hands in his pockets, his back to the hall.

Camilla had at least the grace to regret her action in leaving him in that marked way, for when the others were going in to tea she lingered and went back to the window. She stood looking at his back a moment, at the clean way his hair grew on his neck. She was certain he knew she was there, close behind him, but he never stirred. She found herself repeating his action of a little while before—her arm slipped through his. "You might help me, Michael—"

"Help you, dear?"

"To get away quietly for a few days."

She had only to look up at his face to realize how little she could hope for his help to such an end.

"You'll feel happier when we've had a good talk. Directly after tea," he said with sudden energy, drawing her towards the next room.

Camilla held back an instant. But as she looked again at the unyielding face, she was conscious of the already tightening chains.

"It's one of the nice things about the Catholic Church," she said wistfully. "*They* let you go into retreat for a few days, and nobody thinks ill of you for wanting—"

"Wanting what, Camilla?"

"A little breathing space."

. . . . . .

Instead of dribbling out, they all came back into the hall together after tea. The weather had changed. There was a young moon in a clearing sky, and talk of a run with the dogs, "to make up for the horrid afternoon." Alice tried hard to turn to her own uses the increased readiness she had observed in Camilla to avoid a *tête-à-tête* with Michael. But he, in one of those traction-engine moods of his, was carrying Camilla towards the library: "If you won't be long," Alice called after her, "we'll wait." Camilla nodded as if she meant "Wait."

. . . . . .

He began the instant he had shut the door. "I've been incredibly stupid. I only realized this afternoon what you've been going through." He drew her towards the sofa. "My only excuse is it never occurred to me that you would be keeping things like that from me."

"What things?"

"Why, the things that have been making you unhappy. Like . . ." He turned from arranging the cushions to find Camilla, her eyes lowered, pulling with shaking fingers at the silk fringes of her rose-coloured scarf.

"Yes," she agreed, "we must have a talk. And I don't think I *can* just now. Won't you, please, not mind if we wait till tomorrow?"

"I am afraid I should mind very much," he said with a sternness that made her lift her eyes. This new Michael was a rather frightening person. But the strangest part of it to her was the consciousness that the unexpected sternness on his part steadied her.

"Come and sit here."

She obeyed him; heard him say how impossible it was to "have this going on any longer." She must trust him. When she was hurt or unhappy, who on earth should she go to, if not him?

Who, indeed?

From beneath her heavy lids she glanced at the lean, tanned face, the uncompromising eyes, at the firm-knit breadth of him. The sheer strength of the man showed itself to her as though for the first time. Oh! yes, he would carry, and carry lightly, any burden he chose to shoulder. She was not disturbed, helped rather, as her eyes fell to the shapely hand dropping over his knee, to feel that she had had that day a glimpse of the iron under the velvet. While he talked on, she was intensely conscious—under all his seriousness and the stress of the moment—of that air about him of invincible ease. He could be grave, oh! very, very grave. He could be sad. But you could not imagine Michael worried, or worrying. Whatever came, where Michael was, life would take on some nobleness. And suddenly, with a rush of tears, she realized that that was what she hungered for most, had all along been looking for. Suddenly she dropped her head against his arm, weeping, with bent face out of sight.

Michael never stirred. He didn't know she kissed the cloth of his sleeve. His comforting voice went on telling what life was like when two people trusted each other. She, only half listening, knowing it all by the light of the man's character, saying to herself that alone with him like this, close to him like this, the magical safety he knew the secret of made all fears phantasmal, like something you dreamed and, however much you tried, could never distinctly recall. Nothing was clear or valid except the safe, safe place where Michael was.

Her hand was lying half wrapped in the fringes of the scarf. He laid his over it.

"What is it that . . ." she half raised her face intending to say, "What are you pricking me with?" She moved her hand a little and glanced down. *That* was what had pricked her!—a tiny dun-coloured burr tangled

in the long silk fringe. Michael was so intensely still, she turned and looked at him.

"Why did you do it?" he said, his clear eyes full upon her. "Why do you shrink away when I—"

"I didn't shrink. I—just moved nearer the fire."

He put obvious pressure on himself to say quietly he believed the truth was she'd got herself so into the habit of warding people off, "you forget—it's me."

She sat bent forward, her chin on one hand, a fold of the scarf round the other, the hand that had been caressed "and stung," she said to herself.

She had the air of looking down into the bed of coals. In reality she was staring at the little seed-carrier in the fringe. Not so big as a peppercorn, the body behind the spines. Yet it obscured Michael, it wiped out Nancarrow, it annihilated all the rest of the round world except a sandy tract—far off, sun-steeped, clothed in pine trees and little, low-growing weeds. You never saw the envious weeds as you walked along till, with scratch and sting, they called your senses back from the copper-brown boles, so loved by the sunset, called you back from the green feather plumes patterning the sky, from the aromatic fragrance of the long-needled southern pine. "Oh ho! you have eyes only for the proud trees? You'd trample us down! Take that, then!—and ten thousand more."

Florida!

Terrible the power of evocation in these little inanimate symbols of things gone by; ended, as we have thought; forgotten as we hoped. A pebble that has lurked in a corner of some pocket, and that brings to you, far inland, the sound of the sea, and a memory you had put away. Some tiny spray of Southdown thyme clinging withered to a buttonhole. It crumbles and falls, giving out its old remembered sweetness; and to you, pent in some foreign city, comes wind and sun and a voice from home.

Florida! All that old existence pricked to life by this tiny seed-carrier. More than anything Camilla knew in nature, it would cling and cling and refuse to leave you. Would you pull it off your stocking, or the underside of your skirt? Try. See how it will fasten its curved spurs in your skin. You would get it away from one finger? It sticks to two, and your labour drives one point or another farther in. If you force it to leave go, you may get rid of it piecemeal. And be sure some hooked point is lodged in your flesh to gall and fester.

Camilla left it in the fringe.

Florida!

The steadying sternness had gone out of Michael's voice. The something else came into it. And it was very low.

But—Florida!

"Do you realize," he said suddenly, with his mouth at her ear, "that you've never but once kissed me of your own accord?"

"Oh! well," she said lamely, "it's usually the man—isn't it?"

"Very well, then." The blood was in his face, as he seized her hungrily.

A cry that might, even through Nancarrow walls, have reached the hall: "No! *No!*"

It was too much.

"*Hush!*" he commanded her.

It was not because his hands were holding her shoulders in a vice; it was with the sight of his face that a kind of terror came upon her.

"Oh, not like that! Don't look like that. Forgive me, Michael. Don't you see?" she held up the fringe, "something very sharp and sudden pricked me."

He shook his head and let her go. He sat down in the corner of the sofa with unseeing eyes.

"Look! it's a sand-spur;" she held the fringe up before him.

Again he shook his head. "*That* wasn't the reason. We don't have sand-spurs here."

"I know. It must have been there ever since . . . a long while. I didn't remember," she went on as though this were her sin; "really and truly I didn't remember I'd ever worn this in Florida. But you see I must have."

"We can't go on like this. It isn't the first time you —you've made me feel—that something in you shrinks when I touch you. I've got to be told, Camilla. Why are you like that?"

"Oh, I don't know—" she flung out her hands suddenly like a person who utters a last cry for help before going down: "I don't know!" The flood of weeping overwhelmed her.

Wounded and wretched as he was, her misery called to him. "You are excited," he said gently. "I've seen it these two days. And that idiot Blanche, this afternoon . . . other people too?" His eyes begged her to unburden her heart. "They've been saying things?"

She seemed not to be able to stop her tears. Her drowned eyes turned anxiously to the door. His eyes, too.

"Come. Come upstairs. We'll go up through the tower, and you won't meet a soul."

He took her to her room.

His unhappy face on the other side of the threshold as she shut the door!

. . . . . .

She did not go down again that night.

In the smoking-room that evening, after all the men had gone except Michael, "What have you been doing to Camilla?" Alice asked outright.

"I wish to God I knew!"

"You've said or done something."

"What opportunity have I had? I haven't seen her alone for more than five minutes for ages."

"Well, something has happened."

"Did she say so?" he demanded.

"No—saying things isn't her forte. But *something* has frightened Camilla."

"What in the name of . . . what makes you think that?"

"Oh, men are so dense!" Alice walked up and down with hands behind her and brows knitted.

She stopped by Michael's chair. "Take my advice, *don't you go too fast.*" She left him there.

Upstairs she stopped and listened at Camilla's door. She fancied she heard a slight movement, lifted a cautious hand and knocked. No answer. "Camilla!" she said softly.

No sound.

CHAPTER XVI

SHE came down to breakfast the next day looking as if the emotions of yesterday had been clean wiped out in sleep, and this was a new day.

"A matter of complexion," Alice decided, and therefore no guide.

But Michael, with the undefeated optimism of love, took heart. "Alice and Harborough are coming to ride this morning. Will you?"

Yes, she'd like to.

A fine canter over the fells, miles of springy turf, great sweeps of heather and a honied sweetness in the air tempered by the tonic of crushed bracken.

They were late for luncheon and no one changed till afterwards. Quite as obviously Michael was the cause of Alice's going her ways when the meal was over, as that he kept Camilla down there in the hall.

"She's not going to be 'talked to,'" he had said in warning to his sister. "Too much of that."

His own manner to Camilla, now and all the morning long, had told her the same thing. She was to have time to recover from her hurts. He was there like a watcher outside the door of some one who lay wounded. Camilla, looking into the quiet, steadfast face, had no fear. Not for the present. The future—oh, the future was, for a while, anyway, still the future.

He said she must have another cup of coffee. He knew her weakness for black coffee. Then she had to give him a second cup, and they talked about their ride—and about trees! The kind of talk others would have mocked at as between lovers. It seemed to please them both. Finally, when she rose to go upstairs, his remonstrant eyes glanced about for some further device to delay her.

What was the use of her going off by herself?—and anyway had she seen the package under the table over there, addressed to Mrs. Leroy Trenholme? No? Well, she didn't deserve presents. It's from "those Regent Street goldsmiths that do such good work." He pointed to the name of the firm. Now Michael was notoriously indifferent to the contents of such packages. Yet he laid hold on this one with a very good counterfeit of eagerness. "Shall we see—?"

As she put out a hand to take the box, he clutched it in an access of mock despair: "What *are* we to do if it's more candlesticks? I'll tell you. We might have a new kind of fence round the precious tree nursery. Instead of iron spikes, candlesticks! Very good for baby trees, don't you think?—make 'em sit up!"

She was laughing at his foolishness, but trying, too, to prevent his tearing the paper off the wooden case.

"Don't undo it," she said, serious again.

"Why not?"

She seemed to have no answer ready.

"You know what's in it?"

She shook her head.

"But you know who sent it?"

"Not an idea. What *does* it matter?" she said with a touch of weariness, and then looked down at her riding skirt. "I must take off these heavy things."

"And then you'll come down again?"

No, she thought perhaps she wouldn't come down till . . . she hesitated.

"Not till tea!"

She had meant to say till dinner, and now he divined that. She read as much in his face.

Yet he let her go.

It was her own fault, what happened when she turned back and took his hand: "I've been feeling all the morning how good you are to me, dear."

He kissed her fingers, and then suddenly: "Wait a

moment! Since—since I don't know *when* I'm going to see you again—" he felt in his breast and brought out a pocket-book. He took a letter from it. As he laid the envelope on the table, she saw it was addressed to His Grace the Archbishop—

It was Michael's application through the Faculty Office, Doctors' Commons, for a special licence.

He had found an extraordinary comfort in writing it, when he so needed comfort the night before—a comfort so huge that it had filled the sky with light. For when he looked up this matter of the special licence, all difficulties melted before the powers vested in His Grace of Canterbury. Yet nothing had been further from Michael's intention than to show that letter to Camilla now.

As his sister had said, for all his self-control Michael was very human. And when Camilla, her face upturned, had laid that touch upon his thrilling flesh, with "Dear" not only on her lips but in her eyes—how could he *not* show her this solution of all their fears and troubles.

"It simplifies everything," he whispered eagerly.

"Don't send it today." She hadn't waited for him to point out that the letter was not yet dated. "You *mustn't!* 'In a fortnight' is too soon." She poured it out under his darkening gaze.

"You don't want to be married when we said?"

"I can't . . ." as he turned away from her, "can't so—so *quickly,*" she added in stumbling haste.

He had thrust the hand that held the letter into a side pocket, and leaned back against the table staring at her. "There is something I don't know," he said very low. "Though why you can't tell me—"

"I've *been* telling you," she said stubbornly, "that you've hurried me. You'll admit I've been hurried. You wouldn't even let me go to the Lakes for two days. Why wouldn't you, Michael?"

"I was afraid," he said slowly.

"Don't look like that. It hurts."

"Yes, it hurts."

They both had tears in their eyes.

"I told you yesterday I must go and have a little time to myself first."

"First—?"

"Before I . . . Yes."

Oh, his face!

"*A little time!*" she said, with more of passion in her low voice than he had ever heard. "I *must* have a little time to myself. And I must have it—my little time—in my own home."

His look of mystification and grief gave way to anger. "*Alice!*" came out from set teeth.

Camilla had gone towards the stairs.

"Oh, well—" he followed her. "Queen Anne's Gate isn't the moon!"

"Neither is Florida."

"*Florida!* It's farther still!" He stopped appalled an instant, and then overtook her on the bottom step. "*Florida!* Not all the wounding tongues in christendom could drive you away from me like this. What *is* it that makes you . . . *Florida!*"

"Well, well . . . Queen Anne's Gate then."

. . . . . .

At Michael's summons Alice went jauntily enough to her brother's sitting-room. She came out red-eyed and shaken.

"I *never!*" she told Harborough. ". . . I knew Michael could be pretty awful, but I *never* . . . ! I feel as if I'd been skinned alive."

She flung herself in and out of chairs and alternately raged and wept. Harborough heard only fragments.

Oh, she hadn't taken it lying down! She'd defended herself. "But Michael . . . If it wasn't my doing, what then, in the name of God, *was* it? I lost my head. I

laid it all to her being an American. They loved to torment people with their bloodless Transatlantic coquetry. Oh, Lord! Well, I couldn't do more than take it back—so far as Camilla was concerned. I executed the quickest *volte face* on record. Told him about those Americans at the Fairbairns', and about Mary Macrae being Leroy Trenholme's cousin, and about his plan of bringing his disgusting American horses over here. It would have accounted to any *reasonable* man for Camilla's being all *bouleversée* . . . wouldn't it?"

"Perfectly," the reasonable man assured her.

"Well, Michael will have it that it doesn't account. Oh, you should have heard him! 'All this fury,' as I said, 'just because she wants to go to Queen Anne's Gate for a while.' Then, Michael looking like . . . well, no mortal who hadn't seen him can imagine what he looked like, as he said it didn't account for her wanting to put off the marriage indefinitely."

"What!" said Harborough. "*Does* she?"

"So it seems. And, if you please, Michael wanted *me* to explain that!" With a sudden change of voice: "You don't suppose there's anything wrong with the divorce, do you, Lionel?"

Lionel wondered.

"No," Alice decided again as she had before in Michael's room, "that couldn't be it. It's what I told him . . . Camilla was just nervy and all upset at the thought of Leroy coming over here."

"If the divorce is all right, why should she be upset?" Lionel wanted to know.

"Oh, afraid of running across him, perhaps, or afraid of . . . *I* don't know. But I did say. . . . Good Lord, how angry Michael was . . . ! But he had been skinning me alive. I said he just had to realize, if there's anything on earth more timid than a rabbit, it's the American woman. Unless, of course, she's not respectable. The peculiar discovery of the Englishwoman is

how to keep her personal liberty and insist on being respected."

"*You said that!*" Under the untidy moustache Lionel Harborough's fascinating smile gleamed an instant. "You amazing creature!"

Alice was still knitting her brows and fuming. "To blame *me* for everything! I'm morally certain it's all that Leroy. I haven't a doubt he's a brute."

Lionel thought it more than likely.

"He's terrorised Camilla! That's it!"

If Alice had been at all to blame for the turn affairs had taken, no one could deny she did her best to atone. She was clear-witted enough to know there was no hope at the moment of reaching Michael directly. One way, and only one, there was to recover the ground she had lost with her brother. And so, with a delicate ingenuity few would have credited to Alice, she devoted herself to Camilla. Her report of the extremely *mauvais quart d'heure* Michael had given her differed widely in the second instance from the faithfuller, if more ragged, outpouring to Lord Harborough. So much of the truth Camilla was told as that Michael had been appallingly angry, and that he blamed Alice "for slanging America and being a beast generally."

This confession turned out of much service to Alice.

"Oh, he *mustn't!* I'll tell him—"

"For the love of heaven don't do anything of the kind! You don't know Michael yet. There are times when he's best left alone." There *was* a way to heal the breach. If Camilla would let Alice come with her—

"Come with me—!"

"Only for a day or two. Just to show that . . . well, that he's wrong. That I *haven't* . . . that you don't hate me." She represented herself as having said to Michael—"quite at the beginning, before he went raging mad"—that the thing to do was to let Camilla go up to town, to attend to her trousseau and all the preliminaries.

What more natural? Especially natural, according to Alice, if Michael's sister went too. "I said to him: 'After all, what's Camilla asking for? Only a little time. *Give* her a little time.'"

. . . . . .

Camilla was forced to acknowledge that Alice showed herself of unexpected help. She arranged everything, made everything easy. The immediate result was that she turned the tables on Michael with a staggering completeness by going off hand in glove with Camilla to London the next morning.

"You *do*," Nelly said to Camilla at parting, "you *do* make up your mind quickly."

"It's being an American," Alice tossed out; and then, with a grimace at Michael, "Oh, lor'! there I go again! Come along, Camilla, before my loving brother eats me alive."

If Michael had a definite plan when he said good-bye on the platform, he did not say so. But he took the next train to town.

. . . . . .

Alice behaved astonishingly well. The form taken by her devotion to Camilla was an affectionate discretion beyond praise. Left her alone a good deal, and never seemed to want to go out on affairs of her own. And, strangest of all, never a breath about having Lionel at Queen Anne's Gate.

She spent some time morning and evening at the telephone up in her bedroom, and it wasn't always Harborough at the other end. Michael, in his club, had full reports. On the whole encouraging.

. . . . . .

"You'll be horribly bored," Camilla said anxiously. "All I seem to want to do is to go and look at pictures."

Alice laughed at her for supposing she was the only person who cared about pictures. They went together.

They walked and drove and strolled about some of the old City churches.

For the rest, Alice smoked, devoured French novels, and bided her time.

"One nice thing here is you have such lots of magazines and papers. It's like a news-shop." Usually after looking at the *Morning Post*, Alice fell upon the *Figaro*. The second afternoon, just before tea, she tore the wrapper off the Paris edition of the *New York Herald* which had come in with the letters. "I used to wonder when I was here before why you took in this apology for a paper. Why *do* you?"

"Oh! . . . habit, I suppose."

"There's never *any*thing in . . ." Alice stopped short. There *was* something in it.

That was why!

An article under huge headlines:

LEROY TRENHOLME DENIES

And what the gentleman denied was the smallest intention of setting up a racing stud in England.

Racing had been ruined in America, he was quoted as saying, and it appeared to be in a bad way in England. Since his own particular jockey—a man whose integrity he was as sure of as his own—had been warned off an English course, Mr. Trenholme had reconsidered his plans.

To a previous correspondence there were replies from American residents, both in France and England, on the evidently hotly debated question of the treatment accorded to Mr. Trenholme's jockey.

"He isn't coming, thank the Lord!" Alice handed the paper across the tea-table. Camilla read in silence. Then she poured a second cup of tea. It occurred to Alice that she had never until now seen Camilla reading

that particular paper, before faces. "Makes a difference, doesn't it?"

Camilla looked vague. "It makes a difference to him, no doubt. And to his friends, of course."

"No difference to you?"

"Why should it?"

She's lying low, thought Alice.

She thought so more than ever when—partly out of a slight sense of irritation at Camilla's present calmness, partly from the perennial joy of touching the quick and watching for the jump—Alice embarked on the question of the jockey. The English rules were, she admitted with pride, very strict. That was why English racing—and so on. She administered a prick in passing to conditions in less favoured countries, where a lower standard prevailed.

"The English horror of anything unsportsmanlike—"

"I suppose," said Camilla, "you are not talking about Leroy. Or even about his jockey. For you don't know anything about either of them."

"Well, I've read that correspondence." She quoted Mr. Trenholme himself on the authority of one of his own countrymen.

"No," said Camilla firmly, "Leroy never said that."

"How do *you* know?"

"It's not like him."

"Oh! you can't tell *what* a racing man, who is losing, may take it into his head to say or do."

"Yes, you can," said Camilla, as she rose to leave the room, "if you've lived with him for four years."

. . . . . .

Michael had made no secret of his being in town. He wrote to Camilla twice a day.

"You'll say when I am to come."

It was like Michael.

But it wasn't at all like Alice—this patience, this setting aside her own preoccupations. If Camilla herself

had been less absorbed, she would have been more restive under the acceptance of another's sacrifice.

The nearest approach to a breakdown in Alice's unnatural self-effacement, came after the third of Miss Cramer's daily visits. Although Miss Angelica K. Cramer was described in hundreds of hotel registers as being of Dubuque, Iowa, you would more likely find her doing winter sports in Switzerland about Christmas; going to Rome for Easter; at Marienbad in July and in Scotland in August, with plenty of London and Paris sandwiched between—always in company with different parties of Americans. Not but what being herself youngish, good-looking, moderately agreeable and immoderately well-off, she might not have made friends with "foreigners," as she called all the peoples whose lands she visited. Somehow she didn't. Her passion for the society of her own compatriots continued unabated. Lady St. Amant, for instance, who interested everybody else, did not greatly interest Miss Angelica. The truth was she didn't want to *know* any of these foreigners. As for looking at them, she had seen too many Princesses and Countesses at smart hotels, on Riviera golf-links, at the drinking booths of Kür places, for her to feel any great curiosity about this particular titled foreigner dear Camilla had saddled herself with. In fine, Angelica K. didn't give a dump for Lady St. Amant and Lady St. Amant knew it.

"Why do you let that woman come and worry you?" Alice asked Camilla.

"Oh, she's an old friend."

"*That's* not the reason. The reason is she brings you news of Leroy Trenholme."

Camilla could have sat for the Sphinx.

"I believe you are still in love with Leroy."

"No. He killed all that. Six years ago."

Alice was seized with compunction. "Was he unkind?" A little nod answered.

"Very?"

Again that faint, unwilling assent.

"Cruelly unkind?"

"Don't!" Camilla whispered. Not the shaking lips, not the rush of tears so much, as an impression of the whole slight body quivering under the renewal of some stroke, brought Alice, repentant, to her knees. "Oh, my dear, forgive me! How could I . . . But you see I didn't really know . . ." and so for some moments, with self-abasement, protestation, tears, Alice set herself to make amends. "You'll never forgive me!"

Camilla dried her eyes. "It's all right. You mustn't think that I *really* mind any more."

"I should think not, indeed!—when you've got a man like Michael! . . . Michael would never behave like that."

"No," she agreed, "Michael never would." And presently no louder than a sigh, "Dear Michael!"

She wrote to him that night.

"Please don't be angry, and above all, please try not to be unhappy about it—but I don't get over the feeling that came to me, that I must go away for a little. You know the old superstition about people's native air being the best, the only thing for them when they're out of sorts—'out of kelter,' as we say in the South. I want to try the old remedy. Will you, if you can sympathize at all with my feeling (with this hunger that's on me for the old places) will you come and see me tonight? About nine.

"Your loving

"CAMILLA."

He came.

"I am not letting myself be unhappy about it," he said. "Since it couldn't be at Nancarrow, I can see how everything will be simplified for you if you are married from your old home."

He discussed the various steamship lines and the most desirable boats.

Even her tentative: "The *Mauritania* goes Saturday," was met, after the first little shock, with no opposition. Not even with any marked reluctance. If it was to be, he seemed to think, the sooner the better.

He would see about the passage for her. He was full of help and of what to herself she called a blessed kindness.

The moment came when she found herself saying: "O Michael, you are better to me than I deserve."

The next day he bought the ticket. "'Mrs. Leroy Trenholme and maid.' And that other—what's that?"

"That's mine."

He had taken passage for himself. "By *my* boat!"

"Your boat! The graspingness of some people? Do you want the whole of the *Mauritania* to yourself?"

He wasn't to cross with her. Part of the plan, part of the—the object, was to go alone.

However many openings she gave him for either a breaking out or a breaking off, some invincible steadiness in him refused them all. "I'm not to come till the next boat?" he asked, so quietly an eavesdropper would have thought all boats alike to Michael Nancarrow. But Camilla had the misfortune to look into his eyes.

"O Michael! Michael! what have I done to you?"

"Nothing but what you'll put right."

The steadiness in his tone threw her back on her defences.

"You won't come till I cable?"

"And when will you cable?"

She stood in that old dumb helplessness of hers. Again, as in the library at Nancarrow, he grasped her shoulders as if he meant to shake her. "Do—do. I deserve it . . ." went through her head.

"Camilla, it must be soon. Do you hear, *soon!*"

"Yes, yes, soon."

"Something I don't understand has happened. Some-

thing you aren't ready yet to tell me. But whatever it is—it's all just *nothing* beside the Great Thing."

"You mean—"

"I mean the thing that's happened to you and me."

It was then she saw the only shade of faltering in him—just before he went away. For he knew now, however safe what he called the Great Thing might be—he knew now beyond self-delusion that she would cross the seas and that he—for a while anyway—would stay behind.

But he recovered himself almost before she realized what the moment brought.

"Just so that you understand," he said, a curious intensity in his face—"there are few things I can't bear—for a while."

"Oh! I understand," she said.

"You are *sure?* The thing that has happened to you and me—confess"—he held her so hard that he hurt her—"confess it hasn't happened to you before. Not to feel towards any man as you do to me."

"No," she said with a clear look. "That hasn't happened to me before."

"It hasn't happened in the world!" he said with passion. "I am glad you know"—and with that he let her go.

. . . . . .

When Alice came in, some minutes after her brother had gone, Camilla was still standing in the middle of the drawing-room, just where he had left her.

"So you've been seeing Michael."

Camilla nodded.

"Well—?"

She lifted her bent head. "Michael is the most wonderful being I've ever known."

Alice smiled.

"Been behaving nicely, has he?" she said in her mocking way. "I suppose you know why. He doesn't believe you'll do it."

She lit her eternal cigarette. As she blew out the first cloud: "*I* don't believe you'll do it. You'll have a change of heart—some sudden illumination. You *couldn't* just go off—"

"Michael isn't depending on anything like that," she defended him as from some charge of insincerity. "Michael is the most. . . . Yes. He's Michael."

. . . . . .

That was Thursday.

The next night found them in Liverpool—herself, Michael and Alice.

Oh, the power of these people to "see it out!" However they themselves were feeling—to show a decent face, smile, talk—to note that the by-election in Pembrokeshire was going against the Unionists, and that Melitza was shaping well for the Cup. And under this equable demeanour to put something very like genius into their endeavour to secure another's creature comfort and ease of soul. No reproaches. Not so much as by a look. Michael's masterpiece, to Camilla's thinking, was the arrangement which prevented her going on board till almost the last moment. He and she both spared the misery and tension of a protracted good-bye—and still time enough for the bestowal and the last words. As little of flurried haste as of embarrassed hanging about.

The instant they went on board Alice invented the immensely important errand of seeing the deck steward about the best place for Camilla's chair. Michael's part was to find the cabin and to laugh at Camilla for calling it "a state-room," though a room of some state it was, in the best part of the promenade deck. Passengers outside were already walking up and down with friends who were seeing them off. After the manner of your deck promenader, they did not scruple to stare in. For once Camilla forgave them. She could not rid herself of the fear that at the last moment, if left to themselves, Michael's calmness might suffer shipwreck, Camilla's own

being none too seaworthy. She stood in the doorway saying: "Somebody else has put their things here."

No, those packages were hers.

"From you!"

"Mostly Alice's idea—"

"Why—" She pulled off her gloves; to open packages would fill the time, she thought, not realizing how careful the calculation had been—"Why, it's like sailing from the other side. I mean . . ." she tried to catch up her ungracious slip, but the great gong's sounding saved her from the need.

That echoing din was the signal for good-bye.

She stood with dropped gloves on the floor, her hands tight clasped, and all thought of the faces outside blotted from her consciousness.

One face alone—this one in the ugly-splendid little room. And now it had grown dim—that face—as though the salt-wash of her tears had been sea water flowing between them. And still more like a sea change, this sinking sensation that gave her the illusion of going down, down to the great deep. Another moment and these billows of reverberation that swirled about them would sweep Michael and her apart. They would cast her far out on ocean wastes and him on shore—this man who had given her more than love. No hero. Not a man of mark. But she knew she owed to Michael Nancarrow the most precious thing one soul can owe another, the visible proof of the nobleness in man.

Above the din of the gong, and over all the ship's voices, one crying: "Visitors ashore!"

Without an instant's waiting, like a soldier obeying the word of command, Michael lifted her hand and kissed it.

That he turned away so quickly seemed to be only to find his hat. But he stood there with his back to her fitting the hat on very carefully, as a man might in face of a gale.

"Michael!" she whispered.

The only move he made was a slight gesture towards the window, as if to remind her of the throng out there—though little enough the throng were heeding now those two inside the cabin.

"Michael!"

"It isn't a porthole, you see. This is how you shut it—Sideways. See?" He slid back and forth the shutter and the sash of coloured glass. "I'm told the other is the weather side; but all the same, the Captain has promised . . ." he broke off and glanced down as he felt her hand on the lapel of his coat.

She looked at him through dimmed eyes. "Take off your hat."

He stared.

She took it off for him.

"What for—?"

"I . . . I . . . just want to see your nice hair," she said foolishly. As he stood very tall and straight, looking down, "Already you are so far away," she whispered. "Bend down. Oh, bend lower."

. . . . . .

Alice came, calling down the corridor. "If you don't want to be carried off, Michael—"

"Yes, but I do." He was quite himself again by the time Alice reached the door.

Camilla was frankly sobbing.

. . . . . .

Up on deck a pandemonium of gongs and voices, a hurricane of good-byes, orders shouted, a great pushing towards the gangway, and crowding to the rail.

Alice had gone down the incline, and Michael had lifted his hat, as he released Camilla's hand. *"Soon?"*

"Soon."

PART II

AMERICA

CHAPTER I

DURING the last weeks in England so many things had come back—or wanted to come.

Faint enough at first, those intimations out of the past—a ghostly hand hailing her at the end of a long dim corridor. And at first glimpse of that beckoning—Camilla in full flight.

But now, no more evasion of the things that lay behind America. Why should she shrink so from her own land? Since her "going back" was to be thorough, let her go back as far as ever she could go. By way of fortification for the major encounter, let her get such heartening as she could out of remembering that her earliest impression of life was as beautiful and generous as any she had known.

The world to the Camilla of four was a wide place of trees and sunshine. In the very middle of the highest part—Grandfather Charlton's house. On the top of that house, when you had climbed up steep steps that grew out of the attic into the sky—your heart in your mouth, and you holding very tight to Grandfather Charlton's hand, or to his white duck coat—you looked out at a dizzy immensity of sky and forest, blinding sunlight and cloud-shadow moving over trees. Home was Charlton Hill, and all the rest was, for Camilla, just trees. The near ones hung with oranges. The far ones pine and hammock—but chiefly pine woods. Miles on miles on miles—they stretched to the end of the world.

For the first nine or ten years of her life Camilla had been the delicate one of a robust family. An eminent

New York doctor had told her mother that her youngest child would not live to grow up. Mrs. Charlton had hurried the little girl back to the South, and the crisis passed. The same thing happened with a wearisome sameness, till Mrs. Charlton resigned herself to the fact that so delicate a chest couldn't stand the northern climate.

Camilla learned through her two older sisters—from whom she was safe to hear all the most unwelcome truths—how complicating and disagreeable it was of a child to have a chest like that. For their father's business was concerned with the New York Cotton Exchange. Fortunately New York was also the place where the girls' school was. "Fortunately" was the word Camilla early learned to apply to this concatenation. As she grew older and stronger, fear of being sent north to school blackened the sun of many a day. For her Florida home she felt the clinging and passionate devotion of the imaginative and lonely.

She loved the wide airy house with its bare floors and many windows. She loved the sunburnt, dictatorial old man whom most people feared, but invariably went to with their worser troubles. She loved the kindly, smiling, coloured folk; and almost more than anything, she loved the trees. She took her earliest troubles to them. Not to the cheerful, fruit-hung orange trees. To the high-branching, inaccessible pines. There's something about a Florida pine wood—well, when you've lived with one, you know.

After Camilla's worst encounters with Fate in the shape of her sisters and the Sambourne boys—she, like the darkies who had incurred Colonel Charlton's displeasure, would "take to de woods." In the early days she would take Cousin Serena to de woods too.

Much of Camilla's time in early life was occupied in making up to Cousin Serena for her lamentable treatment by other people. Serena was a rag doll, fashioned

and presented by a distant relative who lived in some undesirable region called the West. The doll had been meant for Lucy, the next older sister. Lucy laughed the gift to scorn. Did the woman think she was a baby? And the kind of baby who, at any stage, however immature, could possibly care for a doll like that! She hurled it across the room.

"Oh, paw, paw Cousin Sewena!" Camilla had gone to the rescue. Cousin Serena became her care and solace from that hour.

"Isn't that *like* her?" the sisters said. Camilla's queer preferences, Camilla's queerer friends were the stock joke. The blind, the halt, the undesirable, the disgraced, they were sure of an ally in Camilla.

Since she was much loved (by her grandfather, by the coloured people about the place, above all by her mother) she couldn't have had a very unhappy childhood. At least, one might lean on that conviction if it were possible to forget how heavy is the burden and mystery of life, to many a more robust and lighter-hearted child.

There was the recurrent tragedy of her mother's periodic need to go away to New York. There were the astonishing, inexplicable outbursts of fury on the part of that well-meaning man, Grandfather Charlton. That these were chiefly directed against the coloured people did not lessen Camilla's horror and fear of such manifestation.

When her mother wasn't there she was afraid of the night; afraid of the bull-frogs that hid in the lake by day, and came out at dusk to sound a hoarse and hopeless melancholy, that made your heart almost burst with sadness in the twilight. Afraid of the "squinch" owl that came up with the whip-poor-Will out of the Spring Wood; afraid, beyond anything in the world—afraid of unkindness.

You could punish Camilla more with a stern look,

Mrs. Charlton said, than you could punish the other children with a slipper.

The loneliness of her childhood was not due solely to her mother's absences, nor strictly to the difference in years between her and her two sisters. The six more years that separated her from Lucy, or even the seven that set Julia on a height of authority and leadership, could not alone have left the small Camilla so far below. Her essential inferiority to her sisters was a prime article of faith in the creed of the younger generation. It was so heartily subscribed to by the Sambourne boys, that they might almost be held to have invented it. Looking back it seemed incredible that Lowe and Harrington Sambourne were at their Florida home only for the Christmas and Easter holidays. They so permeated the life there (with their excitements and cheerful outrageousness) that holidays seemed in memory to cover most of the year. The elder Sambournes—Mr. Sambourne, who was much older than his second wife, was a friend of Grandfather Charlton's—brought down to their winter place a whiff of other worlds. They called New York their home. Every now and then they went abroad. There was an older son as well as a daughter, but they were practically grown up. Harrington had a girl twin, Tina; and the baby was a boy. "The Sambourne boys" meant Lowe and the twin. Those two and Camilla's sisters made things hum on Charlton Hill.

The reason at first advanced for the theory that Camilla couldn't do any of the glorious things the other children did, was that she was too weak. Later, this polite disguise was perceived to cover the nakedness of the truth that she was too stupid.

Camilla herself was as much convinced as any one of the justice of this estimate. And not without reason. She was, if not irredeemably stupid, stupider anyway than the other Charlton girls. There was no getting round *that*.

Julia and Lucy were not only strong and high-spirited. They were possessed of a terrifying all-round capability. It extended to every sense and every member. They had the kind of feet that could climb trees and never slip; run as fast as the Sambourne boys; dance; and, whatever they did, never, never grow tired. Their fingers could play delightful music, make any sort of candy and cake, embroider, paint, drive, and play every game that ever was heard of. Their cleverness extended to their tongues. It might almost be said to culminate in their tongues. They paralysed Camilla. They turned her to stone. And then everybody would laugh at her for being "shy."

She was more afraid of what Julia and Lucy might say than of anything on earth this side of school. In those early years sheer dread of ridicule prevented Camilla from trying to do things. Fear of being caught "trying." It is a state of affairs commoner than is recognized. When by reason of extreme youth, or temporary state of health, or any other chance, one member of a family falls behind the rest, "the catching up" is seldom achieved at home. If Camilla could have gone away and started fresh at eight or nine, she could have come back and, with a little acquired self-confidence, have won tolerance at the hands of those merciless critics her sisters and the Sambourne boys. As it was: "*Must* we take Camilla, mother?" "She'll be sure to fall off," Willis Sambourne once said, "or fall down, or fall out, or fall over. It's only the law of gravity that keeps Camilla from falling *up*." How they all laughed! She was the impediment, the kill-joy. She'd better stay behind.

Behind.

That was *her* place.

Camilla had definitively taken on the stamp of shyness and self-distrust by the time her sisters were married—though in their well-known conquering way they married early, and, needless to say, well.

Julia at seventeen had been followed to the South by the young New York banker James Plumstead-Atherley, who, for his pains, was nearly kicked off the place by Grandfather Charlton. Sharp upon grandfather's rudeness—like a horrible reprisal from the outraged North, came the Great Storm. The first snow Camilla had ever known.

"See, mother!" she had cried, running to the window, "pieces of the sky are falling down."

The skies *had* fallen.

That was the tragedy of the Great Freeze that killed Grandfather Charlton's grove and killed something vital in the old man's spirit. Even his swearing powers (for which he was much respected by the majority both of black and white) were blunted. He lost zest. Julia was allowed to marry her banker. Ten months later Lucy became Mrs. Cushing. After going abroad for her wedding trip, she settled down in California, where she and Henry began to raise fruit on a colossal scale, and to raise a family of the same relatively handsome proportions. Nearly every year Mrs. Charlton had to journey to the Pacific coast, as part of the preparation to welcome another little Cushing.

At first in New York, later in Chicago, and finally in New York again, Julia lived happy and prosperous with her James and her Jimmie.

The Chicago stage of the Plumstead-Atherleys' existence went on for four years after that day of bitter memory when, accompanied by her mother, Camilla, aged twelve, was shown into the imposing New York parlour of Miss Holroyd's school.

Two other victims were already waiting to be delivered over to the Principal. One girl, several years older than Camilla, red-haired, plump, satisfied. The mother, a pleasant lady dressed in dark blue grenadine, was trying to reassure the younger girl—"Now, Jessica darling . . .!" Jessica looked about ten, but turned out

to be several months older than Camilla. She was thin and dark and plain, but intelligent-looking, in spite of the disadvantage at which she was first seen—sobbing, with a suffocated sound, and a convulsive movement that set her black pigtail bobbing. Instead of sitting down with a dull acceptance of her doom, Jessica had planked herself in front of her mother, as much as to say: "Look on this misery unmoved if you can!"

Everybody turned at the opening of the door. At sight of the Principal, Jessica gave a despairing gulp and precipitated herself on to her mother's shoulder.

Miss Holroyd came forward smiling sedately. She was tall and elegant-looking. Her black silk rustled. Her dark hair was mathematically waved and parted. A gold-rimmed eyeglass sat on her nose. The faint depression midway of that feature was atoned for by the energy and air of intention imparted by a delicately squared tip.

She had welcomed the two parties exactly as though no one there had greeted her with a gulp of loathing, as though no heart-strings were being silently torn, no pigtail made to jump with grief.

After shaking hands all round, Miss Holroyd talked to the mothers with a pleasant firmness.

The youngest pupil, whom clearly little escaped, appeared to learn on the spot some new lesson. Whether the lesson was fortitude, or whether it was despair of black silk ladies with squared tips to their noses, the child ceased crying. She even smiled in a woebegone fashion as the blue grenadine mother took her leave.

Mrs. Charlton, after a long silent embrace of her child, did the same.

And Camilla gave no sign.

The Principal smiled an eyeglass smile. She said something about Miss Dace coming for them, as she hurriedly followed Mrs. Charlton from the room.

The two younger girls sat there.

The older one stood looking out of the window. Nobody came.

It didn't matter. Nothing mattered now. Camilla, dry-eyed, composed-looking, sat nursing such aches and agonies as made, in sum, a secret comfort: "I shall die of it, so I shan't have to try to bear it long."

With the removal of Miss Holroyd's calming presence the younger child began, less demonstratively, but with more moisture, to weep again.

"Listen here, Jessica," said her sister, "suppose I go and see—"

"Dud-don't you dud-*dare* to leave me!" said Jessica with a fresh outburst.

"Oh, dud-do dud-dry up!" The big girl was losing patience. "If—" she glanced with disfavour at the plain, distinctly impish-looking Jessica—"if you could see yourself, you'd at least wipe your face."

"I've used up all my—"

The older girl didn't hear, she was craning her neck out of the window again. "Will you have mine?" whispered Camilla shyly.

"What a pup-pretty handkerchief!"

"Oh, keep it then."

"What's your name?"

Camilla told her.

"Got any fuf-friends here?"

"Yes, Miss Mary Sambourne."

"But she's a big girl."

"Yes."

"You won't have anything to do with the big girls."

"Shan't I?" said Camilla.

"No," said the other with unexpected firmness. "They—" she turned her red eyes on her sister's back, "they think they're some punkins."

Both sisters looked round as the door opened again. The elder called out an animated "Hello!"

The tall young lady coming in said, without enthus-

iasm, "Why, Cora Swazey, is that you!" and it was Mary Sambourne standing there, looking most beautiful as well as terribly stylish, in a trailing skirt of "maccaroon" silk and a little hat made entirely of crush tea-roses. She came over to Camilla and kissed her in the friendliest way. She asked about Julia, and considered it a pity that Lucy couldn't have come to New York, instead of sending for Mrs. Charlton all the way to California. Then she interrupted herself to announce to the world in general, that Miss Dace was showing a new mother round. She wouldn't be long now. "But Mrs. Charlton thought maybe you'd rather have me than a teacher—?"

"Yes," said Camilla, rising dully.

But they didn't get away at once. The Swazey girls stood talking to Miss Mary, or rather Cora Swazey, the red-haired older girl, did; older, but not of the great age of Miss Mary. Had the Browns got back? Did Miss Mary know what the new French teacher was like? Had she heard if they were to go on with the opera parties this year?

They were near the door now, but Cora Swazey insinuated herself in front of Miss Mary: "One thing I shall die if I don't know. How's Leroy?"

"Leroy? Oh! he's going on just the same."

"I know better than that."

Mary Sambourne wasn't smiling any more as she stood there arrested, although Cora wasn't any longer in the way. It seemed to be Miss Mary's turn to put up a question. What had Cora been hearing about Leroy?

"Not a thing!" the red-haired girl laughed. "Only whenever I *do* hear anything about that person—it's dead sure to be something new."

"Oh!"—and Miss Mary smiled, too, as if she were relieved. "Well, I can't stop now—"

Up two of the longest flights of stairs Camilla's feet

had ever trod. The room she was taken into was good-sized, but rather crowded with small beds. At the foot of each one, a chest of drawers.

"This will be yours. Now come and see my room."

Miss Mary must be loved for ever for sparing Camilla the humiliating necessity of betraying her total extinction of voice. Miss Sambourne went on to explain that being now a parlour boarder and only staying on because the family were still abroad, she had a room to herself. Camilla was taken there and put in a little chair by the bed screen. She was allowed to sit and cry quietly. Miss Mary, with her back considerately turned on the visitor, took off the crush-rose hat and tried it on at a different angle. Then, as the silent flow-over by the screen appeared to be impossible to arrest as yet, Miss Mary took her hair down and did it all over again.

A deep sense of gratitude made Camilla check her tears at the first possible moment. When she had wiped her eyes she noticed the shining of some silver photograph frames on Miss Mary's dressing-table. She drew near on pretence of looking at the pictures—really to advertise the fact: You needn't go on doing your hair any more, kind Miss Mary, I am restored as much as I ever shall be.

"Who is that?" said Camilla in a much-veiled voice.

"He is a cousin of mine."

"And this?"

"The same one—older."

"Why, they're all the same!"

"Yes—all the same."

"He's handsome," said Camilla in a hopeless voice.

"Yes, and doesn't he know it!" laughed Miss Mary.

"I don't see," said Camilla heavily, "how he can help knowing it."

"Come now, I'll help you to unpack your washing things."

If only it could have gone on. But Camilla's intercourse was chiefly, as Jessica had forewarned, with the lesser beings of the lower grades.

The never-to-be-forgotten misery of that first night came back, along with a warm city smell that drifted through open dormitory windows. No breath of the Gulf breeze that visited Charlton Hill.

Oh, Charlton Hill!

The dormitory was full of the voices of girls who could laugh at leaving home. Camilla went to the nearer window. She put her head behind the blind and wept. Millions of lights in a tall, overbearing building opposite, added poignantly for some reason to her sense of the vastness of the world, and her own ever diminishing personality. She was so shrunken and negligible that if she were to drop through the window into the dark court below, not a soul would miss her.

The only reason they were aware of her now was because she *hadn't* jumped into the court.

"Who is that staring out of the window instead of getting herself undressed?"

She had lost everything—even her name.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER II

SCHOOL was a place where what you chiefly learned was this misery of home-sickness.

Not that Camilla disliked New York, except in so far as it wasn't Florida. And she didn't actively dislike school, except for its failure to be home. In spite of Jessica's kind attentions, this *nostalgia* for the "old Home Place," as the darkies called it, became so acute as to culminate in physical illness. Camilla Charlton was put to bed and tended for intermittent fever, though one form of her fever showed no intermittency.

One God-given day in late October Mrs. Charlton—indefatigable traveller—reappeared and took the girl home.

Before ever she reached Grandfather Charlton's, at mere sight of the Georgia pine barrens, behold Camilla smiling, free from fever, hungry for food.

After a fortnight she was mercilessly restored to Miss Holroyd's, to be greeted by Jessica with more alacrity than sympathy: "Everybody will always know, after this, however diseased and dying you look, that you're only just being a baby and don't want an earthly thing but to go home."

Attacks of the malady continued at increasing intervals, till the new sun rose on Camilla's horizon. A little this side of the great Dawning, a bridge over that gulf of night as well as a factor in development, was Jessica Swazey.

Of the knowledge acquired in those first years at school Camilla owed as much to Jessica as to any teacher on Miss Holroyd's highly accomplished staff.

Many of Jessica's revelations were nothing short of breath-taking. Among the lesser, but bewildering pieces of information, the fact that Cora's mother wasn't the Mrs. Swazey who had brought the girls to school. That

was Jessica's mamma. Cora's—oh! quite a different person. So different as to be dead. Moreover, and this tied the hardest knot of all in the tangle, Jessica's father had gone away and left his second wife—the blue grenadine mother—and married another lady. Out of delicacy Camilla forbore to say what she thought of such a father. But she felt safe in saying that the supplanting third wife must be very horrid.

"Horrid? Not at all. She was awfully nice."

"You don't *know* her!" gasped Camilla.

"Know her? I should just about guess I do! I spend six weeks with father and her every year. It was settled like that at the trial."

Then all the details of that trial—which had taken place when Miss Jessica was eight—no single unsavoury fact of which had escaped the servants, or the child committed to their care. Looking back, Camilla was struck with fresh amazement to think that any one who showed herself so childish in many ways as the Jessica of that period, should yet have understood the implications in the divorce court story which the little girl told quite horribly well. She narrated the exciting history, ostensibly, as a proof of confidence; though that was not to say she hadn't done this before, and wouldn't do so again. But no one had been, or was likely to be, as ungrateful as Camilla.

"Don't tell me any more, Jessica."

"Why?"

"It's too hideous."

Hideous, indeed! "Exciting," other confidants had found it. Besides, the world was like that and it was just as well to know.

Against this view of life Camilla—strangely, for so contained a little person—protested with an earnestness that bordered upon passion. She actually found her tongue, the dumb creature! And to show that she, too, "knew things," she told Jessica that the first Mrs. Sam-

bourne, Miss Mary's and Willis's mother, wasn't dead as Camilla had always supposed up to a few months ago. Miss Mary's mother and a younger brother and sister lived abroad somewhere.

Not married again?

Oh! no. But away like that—dead to everybody. It was a dark secret. It was ignored. It was, if not a disgrace, so deep a sorrow that it couldn't even be whispered down in Florida. Camilla had heard that one of the cardinal differences between the darkies and the whites, was in this what she called "the for ever and everness" of marriage. She was sure that in the South this changing about of husbands and wives was as rare among white people as murder. Oh! it was rarer than murder, she decided.

"Well, it isn't in New York, *nor* Buffalo, *nor* Washington, nor *any* place I've ever been in," said the experienced observer of twelve. Divorce had much to recommend it, Jessica insisted, secretly enjoying her rôle of Master of the Life Show, whose part it was to open the door on mysteries and marvels. "I've noticed people are often better apart."

"It's *never* like that down in Florida!" Camilla stuck to it. She had examples. "Sister Julia and Sister—well, Lucy and Julia," she amended. For she had already been mocked at for referring to those acknowleged heroines in the fashion adopted by Southern families. The astute pair had apparently never betrayed their country manners. At home they not only addressed each other in that way, they even said "Sister" Camilla, which to be sure was taken as a grace. But for her to call her older sisters by their Christian names without prefix would have earned a small cuff and a "Mind your manners, brat!" But New York was a queer place, and so—"Julia and Lucy and their husbands will always care for one another."

"Give 'em time," returned the misogynist.

Time! If time was the proof Jessica needed, let her take Mrs. George Charlton for an example. The greatest trouble of that lady's life had been the need to divide herself between the husband who had to be in New York, and the child who used not to be able to live in the North.

"Well, your father," said the incorrigible Jessica, "wasn't he pleased enough?"

"How horrid you are! Father perfectly hated it."

Jessica was enjoying herself. It was usually very hard to work Camilla up. She was "sure enough" worked up over what, as seen by the eerie-eyed Jessica, was a common-place. Jessica regarded judicially the next witness on Camilla's side. If it was a question of still more "time," there was Grandfather Charlton! He had cared more about his wife than he cared about his sons, more than he cared about anybody. The old coloured people about the place who had come down from South Carolina with grandfather and grandmother when they were all young, the people who knew them longest and best—like Aunt Keziah the cook (who was a little of everything besides)—they one and all said grandfather never even used "wrong words" before his wife. *That* showed! And he never was so "tempery" with other people before he lost her. She'd been dead for ages and ages, and to this day when grandfather spoke of her his voice would grow softer and his face gentle.

This was all truly reported. But there were other tales current, too, of grandfather's violence towards his wife—wicked stories got up by his enemies, of high words and door-slammings; but as Camilla never had believed a word of this herself, she naturally did not feel called on to darken counsel by giving fresh currency to dying scandal. As a crowning piece of evidence, she told how, though her robust sisters had been robustly spanked for their misdeeds, she herself had never suffered chastisement but once. And that had been when grandfather had roared at her and cuffed her soundly for breaking a

little cracked china box which grandmother had had when she was a child. Camilla had dropped the poor old box. "Smashed it to smithereens!" he said, raging. But he got down on his marrow bones—wouldn't let anybody else come near—and he gathered up the pieces and with incredible labour he fitted and glued the wreckage all together (except in one impossible place) and put the box back again in the post of honour on his writing table.

"And there was Great Aunt Loring. I never knew till I was home this time why she was always lying there, and looking out over the hedge towards the honeysuckle mound. It was because her husband died of a strange new complaint, and the doctors were crazy to cut him up and see what it could be. Of course Aunt Loring prevented anything so horrible. The doctors were furious. And Aunt Loring was afraid they'd dig up the body and steal Uncle Matthew. So she wouldn't let him be buried in the graveyard down at the church. That was a mile away and very lonely. When grandfather came back from the war, he found a burying ground much nearer the house than he would ever have allowed, and Aunt Loring very ill and moved down into the big west room so that she could "keep watch." Camilla's eyes were full of tears as she said: "Aunt Loring kept watch over Uncle Matthew for more than thirty years. And she's keeping watch yet."

. . . . . .

Before the term was half finished they began, as people do at school, to count the time till holidays.

"Perhaps we'll be travelling part of the way together," Camilla suggested.

"Oh! but I'm not going to Washington," said Jessica. "I'm going to spend Christmas at Buffalo with my other mother."

Her *other* mother!

"How dreadful for you! Do they *make* you go, poor Jessica?"

"'Dreadful!' Not at all."

"You *are* brave—poor Jessica!"

"Why do you keep on 'pooring' me?" the eerie blue eyes were narrowed suspiciously.

Camilla considered. "Do you—do you have to kiss her?"

"Of course I kiss her."

"If it was me," said Camilla solemnly, "I'd die first!"

"Oh! as far as that goes, heaps of girls have divorced fathers and mothers. Why, in this very school . . ." And more stories.

"I don't understand," Camilla kept saying. "Why did they marry if they didn't care about each other?"

"Oh, you *are* dull! I suppose it's being brought up like that."

"Like what?"

"Why, in the backwoods." The impish face was far from unfriendly. It seemed to say: she is a funny girl, this Camilla Charlton, but on some grounds not such a bad "best friend."

She was quite ready to give you her pink hair-ribbons and her little four-leaf clover pin. She heard you your lessons; and no amount of skilful cross-examination by the hated and feared Miss Dace would induce Camilla to "tell on" the girl who smuggled fruit cake into bed, and smuggled notes out to various "boys." Miss Jessica already had two devoted beaux—and one glorious unattainable idol.

It was a relief to Camilla to turn from revelations of a disquieting nature to that common and absorbing preoccupation of Miss Holroyd's young ladies at the epoch in question.

Jessica had already explained that it wasn't any objection to Camilla, personally, that made Cora and one or other of the big girls, suddenly break off in the middle of animated conversation and walk away with heads together and lowered voices. "They think I don't know

what they're talking about!" Miss Jessica jeered at their backs.

"And do you?"

"Well, of course. They're talking about Leroy."

"And who is Leroy?"

"Mary Sambourne's cousin. Everybody in this school talks about Leroy."

Camilla asked how Cora and the other girls had come to know him.

"They don't *know* him exactly. But they've seen masses of pictures of him, and one Sunday he called for Miss Mary—Julie Roper fell over the banisters as she was watching him go out the front door. He was splendid." Jessica described him. There were other boys of varying claims, but none so "splendid," according to Jessica, as Mary Sambourne's cousin.

For two years, from the time Mary Sambourne was fifteen till she was seventeen, she had spent most of the holidays with her Trenholme cousins, either at the Madison Avenue house the girls all knew the outside of so intimately, or up at Vandewaters Landing, the place on the Hudson. In either setting the picture of Leroy shone with an exceeding lustre. After every holiday Miss Mary brought back a fresh crop of sayings; of slang; of "ways" which were instantly recognized as Leroy-isms and as instantly adopted by the school. For instance, there was that moment during Leroy's teens when the word that fitted surprise, admiration, every emergency life offered, and every passion the heart can know, was best expressed by "Geewhillikins!" That year it hailed Geewhillikins in Miss Holroyd's school.

There was a story current of a new girl who had stared round on her companions at the first recess and said: "If it wasn't impossible, I'd think a boy I know had been to this school."

The boy, she said, was Roy Trenholme.

CHAPTER III

MISS MARY won immense popularity by not being the least bit selfish about Leroy. Although naturally she only condescended to tell big girls about her cousin, the news would gradually filter through the different academic layers, till even Jessica—particularly Jessica—had ever fresh incentive for being what they called "perfectly wild about him." Who wouldn't—however tame naturally—be wild about such a person?

You "placed" him but poorly by saying he was at Yale College, indeed! When Leroy wasn't skating, or sailing his boat, or singing absurd songs, he was dancing like an angel, or riding like fifty thousand devils. To crown all, he was the awfullest flirt, and broke more hearts—!

Upon Miss Mary's return after the Christmas holidays of Camilla's first year at school, she brought grave news. Leroy's family were anxious about him. There was a rumour that he was getting himself mixed up with Isabelle Mercereau of the Opéra Comique. Now, Isabelle, to judge from her picture, or her pictures rather, in the papers, was a person any young gentleman of taste might run a risk of being mixed up with—if he had the chance.

Leroy's dangers, and his fascinations, were endlessly discussed by the school. The anxiety of young Trenholme's family was as nought in comparison with the anxiety of Miss Holroyd's young ladies.

With one exception. And the reason there was a single exception was that one Saturday afternoon in early spring, as the pupils were walking sedately two by two, with the French mistress and Miss Dace, at the head of the column, an extraordinary thing happened. A couple of young gentlemen on horseback passed the pedestrians.

One of the riders—the one specially noticed—was fair and smiling and "outrageous-looking," as the young ladies afterwards agreed. He was the one who took off his cap to Miss Mary.

"Leroy!—It's Leroy!" the word flew electric down the ranks. Every one recognized the face made familiar by Miss Mary's photographs, and every one said that he was much, much more fascinating in the flesh, with the sun striking blue flashes out of his eyes and lighting up a smile which no young lady could expect to be proof against. Two of the three girls who broke all rules by looking round after he passed, declared that he had turned in his saddle and was staring back. *And smiling* —oh! in a most marked way. Didn't that prove there was nothing serious in the Mercereau affair?—in spite of Miss Mary's saying she was afraid he did it—(namely, the turning round and smiling)—solely and simply to annoy the old cats. The old cats being those admirable and accomplished ladies at the head of the procession.

One of the strangest things about the incident was that Camilla Charlton was one of those who broke the looking-round rule. Camilla! The measure of the degree to which this was held to be unlike her, may be gathered from the fact that she wasn't even among those reprimanded. It could only have been inadvertence.

After that First Meeting, as she called it to herself, Camilla had no fear that this young god would condescend to "mix himself up" with any undesirable person.

She would steal into Miss Mary's room, when the parlour boarder was in the parlour practising, and at first glimpse of the picture in the tarnished silver frame, Camilla's heart would leap up in her breast as though here and now was the Second Meeting. She would stand there meeting the pictured gaze, till emotion made her giddy. She would lean against the foot of Miss Mary's bed, a moment. Presently she would go to the door and

listen. If all was well, she would come softly back, bringing the solitary chair. She would sit down before the face with hands clasped, and breath fluttering out of parted lips.

One day she arrived at the shrine with an old kid glove. She dipped it into Miss Mary's ivory powder box and fell to polishing the silver frame of the picture she loved the best.

Miss Mary noticed the renewed brightness.

Camilla was stricken with terror of the need to confess. Her face would have saved her the trouble, had Miss Mary happened to look at it. But Miss Mary thanked the chambermaid and tipped her.

Miss Mary had been invited to spend Easter at Grandfather Charlton's. She and Camilla were going down together.

One day she came in and surprised Camilla, standing in front of the dressing table quite lost to caution, hypnotized by long staring at the pictures.

Miss Mary put her arm round the girl. "What do you think your family would say if I made Leroy come down for the holidays?"

To have Leroy at home!

The prospect shimmered and shone.

Camilla wrote a pretty letter to her grandfather, setting out the young man's claims to consideration, chief among these being his horsemanship. That would "get grandfather." To her mother she represented the scheme as "a return to Miss Mary for being so kind to me. Leroy is her favourite relation and she says he *needs a change* badly."

The letters went off on a Saturday. Camilla hardly slept that night for excitement. Leroy Trenholme at Charltons! She saw herself going about with him, showing him all the "special" places—sharing things that never yet had been shared with any one. She saw him coming to love everything, in that dear place—including

Camilla. Oh, specially Camilla! And would he tell her so, up on top of the house, some evening by starlight? Or would it be in the pine woods some morning after rain? Or down by the spring when the sunset had hung that curtain of vermilion behind the live oaks? Yes, there . . . the Spring Wood at that hour was magical, like Leroy himself. She remembered how quickly after the curtain's flaming it turned to purple and to grey. Then . . . the all-enfolding dusk.

She and Leroy—

Her heart beat as wildly in the dark of the dormitory as though she were down in the dark at the spring with Leroy.

She could feel him kissing her, and saying: "No one must know. They'd say you were too young. But I'll wait for you."

Saturday, that was.

A Sunday of shining dreams, and then that never-to-be-forgotten black Monday, when the silver-framed photograph, and all the others, vanished from Miss Mary's dressing table.

The emptiness! Intolerable, yet necessary to be endured, like death. Yes, it was as if Leroy Trenholme had died.

Practically he had, according to Miss Mary.

The papers of that day were full of it.

Leroy had run away with Isabelle Mercereau. Sailed away with her, rather.

There was a picture of the yacht. The aching mind supplied two figures to the empty deck. Leroy and the Siren Singer, in each other's arms.

Before taking flight the leading lady of the Fifth Avenue Opéra Comique had admitted a secret marriage between herself and the younger son of the multi-millionaire James Trenholme. There were interviews, columns long, with the friend to whom the aforesaid admission had been made—pictures of the high contracting parties

—of their respective homes and of Miss Mercereau's favourite rôles, of her cats, of Leroy's relations.

The evening papers printed feeble denials of the story.

The young man's father had said with icy anger: "There is nothing in it."

The answer to that came from the Impresario at the Opéra Comique. If nothing more, there was a lawsuit in it. Miss Mercereau had committed a breach of contract. She herself was bankrupt. The young gentleman who had called the new tune, must pay the Piper.

"He is a minor," the Trenholmes' lawyer had replied.

"He is the lady's husband!" blared back the impresario as with every brazen instrument in his famous band. Friedrich Weinberg didn't care whether the damages were paid by young Trenholme, or by young Trenholme's father—just so they were paid.

The wrangle went on . . . with a minimum of aid from James Trenholme.

For days the story, and its ramifications, occupied the front page of the New York dailies.

Meanwhile the disturbing pair had melted into the horizon that spans the southern seas.

. . . . . .

The misery of those days was a worse thing than homesickness. During that other grief of parting, you knew all that your torn heart had clung to, was still there. You would go back to it one day. But here was loss utter, final. Loss to both, she told herself. The glorious Leroy had thrown himself away. He had thrown *her* away. She, Camilla Charlton, was a mere husk on the rubbish heap of the world. And *this* was how it was to end.

She was far too profoundly absorbed in contemplation of her own tragedy to think of what this event might mean to others. Miss Mary's sudden decision that she'd had enough of parlour-boardering scarcely mattered at

all. After the silver frames had gone, it mattered less than little, that Miss Mary should go too. Her elder brother Willis came for her, and they joined the family abroad.

. . . . . .

Camilla had been two years at school when the United States battleship *Maine* was blown up in Havana Harbour. America burst into a blaze of anger against the long-suffered Cuban chaos. Nobody talked of anything but war. Many who for years had declaimed and written about the impregnability of the United States, began to explain how easily Spanish warships could bombard Atlantic cities into heaps of ruins. People sent their silver, pictures, and securities to safes at inland places. For months the newspapers had been preparing the people's mind for the necessity of "saving Cuba."

Camilla had heard as little as possible of the accounts, ghastly and ever ghastlier, of General Weyler's alleged cruelties. Why doesn't America go to the rescue? she wondered, weeks before the outrage on the *Maine*.

And now America was going to the rescue.

Leroy Trenholme had joined the First United States Volunteer Cavalry.

Not one of all the earlier accounts, that filled the papers, brought the young lady confidence in our war preparations. But with Leroy and the gallant Colonel Roosevelt—newspapers put Roosevelt first, not Camilla—with those glorious two, Rough Riding over wrong, Cuba was saved. American honour was saved. She said as much to Jessica under the stress of unusual feeling. "Oh, I'm *glad* Isabelle hasn't prevented him!"

"Isabelle! What's she got to say about it?"

"Some wives—"

"She isn't—never was his wife. You *are* pig-headed about that!"

It was an old controversy. Camilla knew that Isabelle

was "back" and singing again. But that didn't prove—

"Of course it does," Jessica said with a woman-of-the-world air.

Leroy and Isabelle had returned from their cruise after Miss Holroyd's school broke up. Camilla had not seen the papers which chronicled the event and discussed its general bearings.

From holidays spent with her father and mother on Long Island Camilla came back, to find that Jessica had a new hero, who climbed mountains. Heroes were plentiful that season. Every separate group had its own. The man who in his sole person had been able to focus the admiration of the school, Leroy Trenholme, was as though he'd never been.

. . . . . .

There was no neglect of the newspapers that summer of the Cuban campaign. Every evening Camilla used to walk to the Bay Cliff station of the Long Island Railway, to meet her father and to get the evening extras.

"Our boys are showing those fellows!" he'd say.

As they walked home, she would open a paper and glances at the headlines. To this hour she could see the stretch of dusty road and the look of the burnt, unkempt countryside on that August evening; still hear her father's voice saying "More muddling in Washington. But our boys down yonder—*they're* all right!"—and she, stopping short for a second to stare at the opened paper—

"Yes—" she brought out, "they are all—" And walked on, folding the headline out of sight. Had Mr. and Mrs. Sambourne come her father asked? and then he talked about the basket of fruit he was bringing back to her mother. It was Mrs. Charlton's birthday.

And all the way Camilla kept seeing the little wooden villas, the very air, painted over in thick black letters:

CAPTAIN LEROY TRENHOLME
SEVERELY WOUNDED

"I'm sorry to say your nephew's been getting it," was Mr. Charlton's greeting to his guests. They talked about Leroy for a while.

Then, like Miss Holroyd's girls, they forgot him!

After supper they sat out, as usual, on the porch. The ladies, in thin white muslin, plied their fans and talked about Florida; how Grandfather Charlton was growing more and more impossible to get on with, and the place was going to ruin. Camilla's father and Mr. Sambourne, in pongee coats, smoked and talked about Admiral Dewey, and the difference in battleships since the days of the *Merrimac* and the *Monitor*.

Camilla leaned her head against her mother's knee and shut her eyes. Leroy in agony—with a great wound torn in his side!

And here was her father, leaving the war to take care of itself, leaving Leroy and asking about the Sambourne boys—as if they mattered!

Lowe Sambourne was "in Cuba too," correspondent for a syndicate of Western papers. Good thing for Lowe to have his mind taken off those jejune schemes of his for righting the universe. Lowe had squandered a year —"a whole year of golden youth," said Lowe's father, honeying the phrase, "investigating labour conditions." Mr. Sambourne dropped his indolent air, to say with smiling briskness, as if it were a joke: "I don't pretend to understand the modern young man. Do you, George?—the man, I mean, who doesn't *have* to grub for a living. He seems to have lost—utterly lost—the—what shall I call it?"—he waved a smooth white hand—"the exuberance of youth. The modern young man doesn't run into debt (hasn't so much to run in debt *for!*)" he threw in slyly. "Doesn't drink—not as men used to. Thinks about his health. Bad enough to *have* to, at fifty! Imagine worrying about your health when you're twenty and sound as a bell!"

"Perhaps that's the only time it's any good."

"But think of what they *miss,* man!"

Camilla's father thought in silence.

"No," Mr. Sambourne went on, "the modern gilded youth is beyond me. He often lives in the slums. When he *doesn't,* he works. Pretends he likes it. There was my Harrington, let loose in Paris. Entered at the Beaux Arts. And what do you think *he* did?—studied architecture!"

"Wasn't that why he went?"

"Lord, yes! That's just what I'm talking about. Thirty years ago he'd have made architecture his excuse —and his real pursuit. . . . Well, we know what some of 'em pursued. Oh! it isn't only my boys. I see it everywhere. My two nephews just the same. Jim and Leroy Trenholme went through Harvard with their pockets full of money, and came away without sowing a wild oat."

"Leroy?" Mr. Charlton asked doubtfully.

"Even Leroy. Studied less and played more than Jim—lost a little on horses, and developed a taste for the theatre—or more precisely for professors of Opéra Comique. Even Leroy, with his greater *bonhomie,* greater good looks, greater joy of life was as unlike your reckless, dissipated young dog of other days—"

"Perhaps," said Camilla's father, "he had too fair a share of the family energy to throw away time. Preferred to spend it. Too clear a sense of the value of dollars to throw away money. Again, preferred to spend it—getting things that, however mistakenly, he considered a *quid pro quo.* Like marrying the Mercereau."

"Marrying!" Mr. Sambourne checked the gentle oscillation of his chair in order to repudiate the idea. "No such fool!" He resumed his rocking. "Foreigners do that sort of thing. Specially Englishmen. Not your hard-headed young American. With us, now and then a rich *old* man, or a man who makes his money in middle life, *he* may lose his balance and tumble into a marriage

of that sort. Our young men have got themselves too well in hand. If *they're* reckless, they're reckless in a reasonable way. Within definite bounds. I tell you they manage life with a prudence that poorer and older people might envy." Mr. Sambourne laughed a low, rich laugh in which the ruefulness seemed to count for humour.

. . . . . .

In that same Bay Cliff house, three years later, under an operation for appendicitis, Camilla's mother died. Julia, with her husband and boy, were spending that summer with her father and mother, but it was to Camilla that George Charlton turned when he could bear any one close to his grief. In those early morning walks above the beaches—those evenings on the rocks—the girl heard more about her mother's life, came to know both the dead and the living better, than in all the years before. She came to know the nobler possibilities of marriage, as she had only dimly discerned them through that everyday atmosphere which is the best of disguises for the height and depths of human experience.

Camilla had known before her mother's death why it was that they had no house of their own in New York, long after they were quite well enough off to afford it. She could hear her mother's voice: "It is so good for your father to have a place like this, open all the year round, where he can come at any moment, and for so many months of the year go out in his beloved boat. Or just potter about with me and breathe the good air. He comes much oftener than he would if we had a house in New York."

And she came much oftener. That, he told Camilla, was what made coming a habit. Insured equally from worry and from boredom, by putting off the cares of a New York establishment his wife had a great deal more time for him. "She was always ready," he said, looking back. They had agreed, he said, to make the most of

the time they might count on having to themselves—the time till the girls should leave school. Never since the first child was born had they been so much alone together as during these last years.

"Or so happy, I think," George Charlton said. "For there's a happiness that comes of knowledge; of proved security; of shared memories. I have no one any more to say 'do you remember?' to. No one now to companion my past." The past rather than the future had been his theme, partly out of a wish not to lay burdens on the younger life.

Camilla believed, not without some ground, that the wrench and anguish of death had been eased for him a little by this new nearness of his child. She laid her plans. In the holidays, and on Sundays—whenever she could, she would be with him this last year of school. After that, altogether, till . . . Yes, even then.

By virtue of the blessed alchemy of youth she transmuted the register of her father's griefs into the index of her future joys. She and *her* husband would be as close as this, "till death us do part."

. . . . . .

Spring had come round again and Camilla was looking out on the world with the eyes of eighteen. Only three more months and she and her father would be taking up life together.

It was the Saturday evening before Easter—things always happened at the turn of the year—when Camilla, summoned to the deserted school parlour, found Mary Sambourne there.

In that first instant Miss Mary showed herself so oddly taken aback, so hesitant, that Camilla, after greeting her, inquired uneasily, "You did ask for *me*, didn't you?"

"Why, who else?"—and from that time on she was as cordial and affectionate as though it were only four months instead of four whole years since they had met. "I shouldn't have known you," she said, taking the girl's

hand. "You are . . . yes, you *are* . . ." She seemed to turn something rapidly over in her mind. In the face of Camilla's embarrassment Miss Mary kissed her again. "I hadn't realized. . . . It's in the family, I suppose."

As for Miss Mary herself, though you couldn't say she looked older, she was altered. She spoke with a kind of delicate carelessness, letting the words slide over her lips like the pearls out of the mouth of the girl in the fairy tale. There was about her clothes a faint foreign scent. Camilla had noticed the same thing about her sisters' clothes when they, too, had come back from Europe.

Other changes in Mary Sambourne went further, yet were less verifiable. In her air, in her attitudes, an implication of other and widely different scenes. They had all come over in the *Rochambeau,* she said in that pretty way—only two days ago. They weren't unpacked yet. But when they heard that Camilla was reduced to spending her holidays in this dreadful place—

Camilla made haste to justify her family in this connection. Lucy—"yes, still in California"—had a month-old baby. And the Plumstead-Atherleys had gone to Florida to look after Grandfather Charlton. He was failing, Julia reported. "So there's only me," Camilla wound up, "to be here when father gets back from his cruise." He needed somebody. He hadn't been the same since—

"My dear!" Miss Mary pressed her hand. "I know. We are all . . . we have kept thinking and thinking of you." They sat silent for a moment with clasped hands.

"Poor father!" Camilla said, clearing the slight fogginess out of her throat. He had gone back to his bad old ways of sticking too close to work. But wait till Camilla had charge of him! She told their plans.

Miss Mary charmingly sympathetic. "But till he gets back," she looked round on the implacable red satin furnishing, renewed, rich, oppressive as ever, "you don't do him any good by staying—in this place. We'll cheer you

up." The twins were here, Miss Mary said, and Robert Lenox, the man Tina was going to marry, and we *may* get hold of a cousin of ours, Roy Trenholme.

"Oh, how is Leroy?"

"Do you remember him? Or perhaps you've heard he used to be a sort of hero here."

Yes, she remembered to have heard.

"Well, he was wounded at Santiago. And last November he had a bad fall out hunting, and the old wound began to give trouble." She hesitated a second time with her eyes on Camilla's face. "You always were a discreet child, and now that you've grown up—well, the fact is, it's a terrific responsibility having to look after a young millionaire cousin."

"Do *you* have to look after him?"

"Well, sort of. We all do, except Tina. She's no earthly use. We promised his father last Christmas that if Leroy came over to us, we'd see he didn't do crazy things while the wound was healing. It's still more important to see he doesn't do crazy things now—and a great deal more difficult. You see," Miss Mary added gravely, "it's an awfully critical moment."

"Oh!" said Camilla, not seeing in the least.

"Critical for Leroy, I mean; so critical that—" she hesitated.

"The old wound—?" Camilla inquired.

"In a way, the old wound. A breach, between Roy and his father, years ago. Well, it seems quite healed at last."

Camilla waited, longing to ask whether the breach with Isabelle was healed too.

"Uncle James," Miss Mary went on, "is going to take Roy into full partnership . . . at least, that's what we find people saying over here. The older brother died last year, and everybody knows that all that money will be coming to Roy some day. Anyhow," Miss Mary gave the nodding feather in her French hat an anxious shake,

"*any*how, if he wasn't to have a penny . . . Well, when you know Roy, you'll understand. You mustn't mind if you and he don't get on very well just at first. Except when he's been with us, he's been used to—well, rather rackety people, I'm afraid."

In spite of Camilla's falling below even the most reasonable standard as a producer of racket, Miss Mary's plan was to carry her off at once.

Camilla found herself wrestling with an intense desire to fall in with an arrangement which, on several grounds, she felt wouldn't do at all. She hadn't, she said, gone anywhere as yet since her mother's death.

Well, it was high time she did. "Your mother wouldn't approve. . . . Besides, coming to old friends like us—"

With that word "rackety" dinning in her ears Camilla shook her head. "To go straight from here into a gay party—"

"Oh, we're not so gay as all that! We're not gay at all, *really*. We're too anxious. Yes, about Roy. You know how we've all of us felt about Roy, since he was quite little. He's—like a brother," she said with a most unsisterly shyness in her pretty eyes. "And we're dreadfully afraid he's going to upset the apple-cart a second time. To do that twice is at least once too often," said Miss Mary.

Camilla was struck by the incongruity between the light-hearted French hat and the anxious face under it.

"Oh, it's too long to go into. But from what we gather, his side has been troubling him more than he's admitted. What we have to do is to keep him quiet. And you've got to come and help us."

Camilla explained that she'd been left here with the Italian mistress. Signora Pezzali would have to be a little considered, explained to, at all events. She was at vespers. Then there was the packing—"

"Well, tomorrow then—in time for luncheon. Dar-

ling Camilla, it's quite like old times, seeing you—though you *are* so much, *much* more—" She burst out laughing. "It's perhaps only that I hadn't remembered."

. . . . . .

Signora Pezzali's favourite way of taking care of Miss Charlton during the holidays had been to take her to Mass at the near-by cathedral, as often as the girl could be prevailed on to attend.

The Signora was little, and desiccated, and dressed in black. Camilla, at her sister's urging, had put off mourning on the theory that it would make a cheerfuller home-coming for her father.

On Easter morning she came stepping down the avenue in pearl grey and apple-blossom pink, her young blooming in stronger contrast than ever with the sharp little silhouette at her side. They had been to St. Patrick's. Camilla threaded her way through the Fifth Avenue crowds, with little-seeing eyes, thrilling still to the music and ceremonial, which had been fulfilling in Christian terms the old pagan purpose of celebrating the return of the Sun God, and the Quickening of Earth.

The girl had brought out of the cathedral the scent of lilies and the strains of triumph over winter, over mourning, over death. Out here, more irresistible still, the springtide rose in her.

"Why do you walk so fast?" said the Signora, and "Who is that?" she demanded.

"Who is who?"

"That man you smiled at."

Camilla protested she had smiled at no man.

"Well, you sairrtainly did smile."

And at that Camilla smiled again with, "Did I?"

"You know you deed," snapped the Signora, "else why are you blushing like zat?"

Unabashed for once before reproof, Camilla turned her happy eyes to the open door of the Sambourne house —and on to the wide bay window, where she saw a group

of young people laughing and talking. Or, to be precise, she saw with an intensity of clearness, one figure leaning out of the window—and others vague as background ghosts.

. . . . . .

She heard about it afterwards from Tina. Roy had been in great spirits, mocking at the Sunday passers, "all in their awful best." Then suddenly, "Great Cæsar!" and a dead pause.

"What is it?" we asked. The door opened and you came in.

"*That!*" said Roy.

CHAPTER IV

SEEN from outside, he had been in front of the window group. Now he was at the back. He hadn't even the advantage of his height, for he had sat down on the window-sill. And still he dominated the room. To the innocent eye of eighteen he looked like a king enthroned. Any touch of arrogance in Roy's good looks was softened by the look in the grey-blue eyes he fixed upon Camilla, as he sat there saying never a word.

Harrington Sambourne interrupted his twin's effusive welcome and presentation of Camilla, by saying "This is Tina's Bob Lenox. And that one with his back turned on the past—the man you sniped on your way in—"

"Sniped!" she repeated as Leroy came forward and took her hand.

And still it wasn't he, but Hal Sambourne who went on: "Our poor friend has *already* been wounded—several dozen times"—the others duly punctuated that point with laughter—"but never before in the memory of living man has he been reduced to dumbness."

Leroy was looking at her still, in a curious, unconscious way.

"Maybe I've changed," she said, foolish with shyness.

"Yes, you are changed," he agreed. The talk and laughter rose and beat round them like Atlantic seas round some atoll in mid-ocean. Through these surf-sounds she heard herself greeting Mrs. Sambourne, who had come in from church. And she heard the lady call out across the hall: "Granger, Camilla's here. And luncheon's ready."

In the general movement: "Where did we meet before?" Leroy demanded. He was smiling now.

"We didn't exactly meet. You used to ride by . . ."

There wasn't time for more. It was plain he hadn't a glimmer of a notion what she was talking about.

"Then I'm right about the change!" He flashed the quick words in her face. "If you'd been at all . . . like this . . . I could never have forgotten. Because I could never have thought of anything else. I can't now. Do you want me to try? I shan't. Give you fair warning . . ." and that was before they got as far as the library door on the way to the dining-room.

Mr. Sambourne wasn't in the library. He and Jimmy hadn't got back. That Jimmy! Instead of coming to church he had seduced his father into taking him to see the bears at Central Park. Evidently they were making a day of it. Mr. Sambourne was represented as the hopeless slave of his younger son. Everybody had an illustration of the abject condition of the head of the house—everybody, that is, except Mrs. Sambourne.

She changed the conversation.

Mrs. Sambourne, as Camilla found out later, was the sort of person who quietly did what she liked in the way of directing the choice of topics. But so unobtrusively, you thought "it just happened like that"—or even that you, yourself had done it.

Mrs. Sambourne was still a strikingly pretty woman. One of those Americans who at middle-age retains a look of youth that borders on school-girlishness. It was with Mrs. Sambourne a look, as distinguished from an air. Her manner seemed designed to erase, or to cover that schoolgirl stamp.

As the only member of a group whose main occupation in life seemed to be to make rather noisy amusement for a semi-invalid soldier-hero, Camilla was intensely "out of it." The only thing that saved her from crippling embarrassment was that at the time she was too taken up in her own way with the general object of interest for her to think about her personal inadequacy.

While Leroy joked and told stories—about the voyage,

about Cuba, about everything under the sun, Camilla sat listening and trying not to stare at him the *whole* time. Oh! yes, he was changed. He was more the man—accustomed to command other men in the field, and accustomed to lording it elsewhere—here unbending, and being the boy again.

The flowers on the table were sumptuous. Camilla pulled herself together to admire them.

Roy stopped short in what he was saying to ask: "You like flowers?"

"Well, doesn't everybody?"

"Oh, no! Besides," he glanced round the table, "you are the only lady here who isn't wearing any."

"Am I?—Well, you see, I hadn't any to wear."

"Do you mean nobody has sent you any flowers?"

She shook her head. "I don't know anybody who would."

"*I* do," he said.

A feeling of rippling warmth flowed over her like a tide.

"Oh! as to that, so do I," Hal Sambourne protested.

Roy ignored him and kept on looking down at Camilla with a concentration that she could feel without seeing. It cut off the others. It isolated him and her.

"What sort do you like best?"

She reflected without raising her eyes.

"Camellias?" he suggested. "You ought to have camellias. Did anybody ever give you camellias?"

No, nobody ever had.

"Look here, Hal, we've got to get Miss Charlton some camellias."

"Sunday—"

"The house is full of flowers," said Miss Mary.

"Camilla can have all she wants," Mrs. Sambourne smiled at the girl.

"I haven't noticed," he looked round. "You haven't got any camellias?"

"Nobody has."

"What? Hard to get, you say?" he challenged the table.

"Impossible to get."

"We'll see about that!"

"I don't care about them," said Miss Mary. "So stiff!"

"Well, *she's* stiff," retorted Roy with his eyes on his neighbour. The table dissolved in merriment. Curiosity for the sequel brought the sudden silence.

Roy waited. The others too—smiling, watching. She would have given anything she had to be able to break through the dumbness that possessed her.

"I'm sure you *love* camellias. *I* do." He said it with a smiling recklessness, with a fervour, that made it sound like a declaration. A mischievous laughter went rippling round the board again.

"This is all very fine," Hal protested. "But what I'd like to know is, what would Linda say?"

"Oh! Belinda has a soul above flowers," Roy answered with a tartness, that brought another burst of appreciative laughter from Harrington. But the ladies of his family cast covert looks of warning his way. The introduction of that name had been like a stone cast in a glassy pool.

Again Mrs. Sambourne changed the conversation. But the waters were troubled. The images that had been so clearly mirrored did not recompose themselves.

Leroy jumped up, saying he must go and telephone.

While he was gone, the conversation broke up into *tête-à-tête,* carried on in lowered voices.

Camilla heard Mrs. Sambourne telling Miss Mary that some one she'd met coming out of church had said "Linda" was on her way back to America.

"Oh! yes," said Miss Mary airily.

Mrs. Sambourne stared. "It's true then! I don't see

how she can stay with us," she added with an accent of anxiety.

"No," said Miss Mary, "neither do I." And both Miss Mary and her mother broke off as Leroy came in. Mrs. Sambourne called down the table to her son, "What are you going to do this afternoon, Hal?"

"What do you say," Leroy suggested, as he slipped back into his place, "to motoring up to Vandewaters Landing?"

Mrs. Sambourne thought it was too far. They'd be late for dinner.

According to Roy that was precisely what shouldn't happen. He swore it shouldn't. Did Mrs. Sambourne want to gamble on it? He'd give her $500 for her pet charity if he didn't get them home in good time.

As one of those trifles which for no discoverable reason stand out in memory, Camilla, looking back, remembered being struck that day by a quite new light on Sambourne domestic relations. The lady still thought of as Miss Mary's mother, was not, it appeared, in complete harmony with her stepdaughter. "Heavens!" Camilla said to herself, startled for a moment out of her own preoccupation, "they don't like one another at all!" The realization came while the young people were putting on hats and things upstairs in Miss Mary's room.

Mrs. Sambourne came in and began instantly to talk about Linda. What were Linda's plans? Mary, absorbed in putting on her veil, hadn't a notion.

"We may be sure," Mrs. Sambourne insisted, "her first plan is to come here."

"Well, she can't!"

"No, not *now*," Mrs. Sambourne agreed without enthusiasm, her cool blue eyes fixed on the face in the glass. "Since you knew she was sailing, I wish you had told me."

"Oh," said Miss Mary, "I thought you knew . . . in a general way."

"General way! How *could* I know unless I was told? A girl we left on the other side of the water not two weeks ago."

"You must have foreseen she'd take the next ship. No," Miss Mary seemed to grant some unspoken objection, "it's hardly decent. But there you are. It's Linda."

"You are rather hard on poor Linda."

Miss Mary pushed out her lips against her veil and with thumb and finger pulled the tightened cobweb away from her nose. She didn't say another word till her stepmother had gone.

Camilla with some difficulty elicited the fact that she had been given the only remaining spare room. She offered at once to make way. After all, she could sleep at the school and this Miss Ballard couldn't.

But it appeared that Linda had twenty places she could go to. "And she's no loss to us. Nobody wants her—except mother. . . . And she doesn't *want* her. Mother went to school with Linda's mother, and she has a theory that if Mrs. Ballard hadn't died, Linda'd have been an angel of light. Come! Roy'll be in a fever if we keep him waiting."

"Where is Isabelle?" Camilla whispered as they ran down.

"Isabelle! You mean that actress that got hold of him? Oh, Uncle James bought her off. She's married to some one else."

"Did he mind?"

"Leroy mind? Perfectly enchanted. There never was anything in that—but a boy flattered by a much older woman. A singer too—yes, and a beauty. She *was* that. And all the other boys had gone mad about her. Very catching, that kind of thing."

They crowded into Roy's big car, Miss Mary very kind and insisting on having Camilla by her.

"No, she's to sit outside with the driver," Roy said.

"Indeed she's not, poor child! She'll be blown to bits."

So Camilla sat in the corner and Roy changed his mind about driving. After all, it was a pull on the muscles. So the chauffeur was left in possession, with Harrington beside him. Miss Mary made room for Leroy. But he had to sit on the other side, he said, so as to be near the chauffeur—a new man. And this was no pretence. Leroy directed every twist and turn in that unforgettable race (after the brief calm of the ferry) through more Sunday streets, over tracks, along suburban roads, on through sunshine and wind. Everybody else talking, only Camilla listening, listening to the voice at her side and to the laughter trailing out behind them like a dust of happy progress. Miss Mary suggested presently that it might be better if he changed places with Hal. But Leroy appeared to prefer punctuating the gusty, spasmodic conversation, by continuing to lean over and hurl out: "Right! Steady here! Left! Sharp turn at the foot of this! Look out! Now let her rip!"

And rip she did.

Looking back later, Camilla felt that afternoon had set the pace of all her days at this man's side. A pace of the sort that made it often impossible to collect one's wits. It was as much as you could do to hold your head on.

When she found they were going to the Trenholmes' place on the Hudson, she asked if they would find the family there.

"Haven't got any family except the Governor. He's out west. But when he gets back . . . I've an idea *you'd* get on with the Governor." Leroy leaped out and swung back the two leaves of an immense iron gate. Then he jumped on the footboard and stood there as the automobile rushed up the drive and stopped before a pillared and porticoed dwelling like the picture of some summer palace of a king.

A manservant came to the door. "I've only opened a few of the rooms, sir. Shall I—?"

"No, no!" Leroy shook him off. "I'm only going to be here a minute. Where's Poole? What's wrong with your telephone? I want some flowers." He was walking rapidly all the while, Miss Mary and Camilla almost running to keep up with him—the others quite abandoning the attempt and distributing themselves about the various rooms full—far too full—crowded and cluttered with beautiful, far-sought things.

Leroy was striding along a colonnade now, and out across a lawn. Just before they reached the glass-houses a grey, square-bearded man appeared.

"Hello, McAndrew!"

"Eh, ye're back!" he said shortly. He treated "Mr. Ra-ey" in a manner half disapproving, half affectionate.

"Got some camellias?" the young man demanded.

"Oh, aye, I doot ye'll be robbing ma hooses in the auld way—!"

"Look! look!" Miss Mary stood in an ecstasy, gazing down a flowery vista.

Leroy clapped the old man on the shoulder. "See here, McAndrew . . . we aren't going to waste time over all this truck—"

"Trrruck!"

"Where are the camellias, man?"

Grumbling half unintelligible remarks about "expecting meeracles" and "may be two or three," he led the way.

"Yes. There! That's something like! Take all you want."

"Indeed 'n she'll not," said McAndrew under his breath.

"I wouldn't dream . . . I don't know how. Won't you give me some, Mr. McAndrew?"

"What!" Leroy whispered, "must McAndrew love you too? He'd die for you now, I haven't a doot."

They were about to go back, Camilla with her hands full, when a tremendous commotion was set up in the kennels. Such a baying and yelping as almost drowned McAndrew's: "They've haird yer voice!"

Roy stood still as if he listened for some note lacking in that chorus. "What's the matter with Cousine Bette?" he said sharply.

McAndrew shook his head. He didn't know, and Johnny Tooley wasn't aboot that afternoon, but in McAndrew's opinion Bette was "vairy bahdd." He had done as Mr. Ra-ey said, put her kennel between the potting shed and the orchid house. And it *was* warmer, and she'd been better for a while.

All her life Camilla felt she would remember the rapture of that ugly, spotty, old French bulldog when she caught sight of her master. And how Roy had responded and tried to quiet her. He advised her, humanwise, "not to go on like that or—yes, there, you see!" The poor creature coughed and wheezed and lay gasping, Roy patting her and Bette trying between paroxysms to lick his hand, looking at him with cairngorm eyes of utter devotion.

"Ye'll have t' come to it," McAndrew said to Roy. "She'll be better dead."

"How do *you* know? We can't find out what Bette thinks . . . but, considering how full the world is of useless old men who don't seem in any hurry to get to Heaven, we may just let old Bette stay there between the shed and the orchid house, as long as . . . If *she* can stick it out we can, I guess."

"I knew he'd say that," McAndrew said, laughing in his beard and looking at Miss Mary. "And does Mrs. Callahan know ye're here?" Roy didn't answer; he was examining Bette's mouth. "Because if ye *haven't* let Mrs. Callahan know—"

"No, and don't mean to," Roy said shortly, getting up off his knee and brushing his trousers.

"Why not let Joanna know you're here?" Miss Mary backed up McAndrew.

"Why? Oh! because I don't care *how* much worse her bad leg is," Leroy said brutally. "I'll send Transome up to see Bette," he told McAndrew, and hurried his party back towards the house.

"Oh, darn my luck!" he said under his breath as a voice sounded behind them. They turned and waited till a gaunt figure in black caught up with them, a woman with thin grey hair parted above a broad, bony forehead; sunken temples, salient cheekbones, and a smallish nose set up in such fashion that the nostrils opened vertical upon the world instead of horizontal. In spite of these hampering circumstances, Mrs. Joanna Callahan contrived, by dint of kind pale blue eyes and a look of radiant goodwill, to make a positively agreeable impression.

She opened a wide mouth full of yellow teeth and smiled broad affection on the young man. "Mr. Rhoy!" She greeted him with more than a touch of brogue. "An' how arre ye, Miss Mary?" She glanced with a polite inclination at Camilla. "Excuse me, Mr. Rhoy" —and she moved to one side in order to give a semblance of privacy to her more intimate salute of: "Oh, me darlin'! An' is it well ye arre?"

"Yes, yes, fit's a fiddle. Great hurry."

"Faith and ye'll not leave this place"—she laid her hand on his arm—"till I've told ye . . . it's the life of my Patrick ye've saved. Sure it's gospel I'm speakin', Rhoy! The blessin' o' the Saints on ye fur ahl ye've—"

"Yes, yes! but the important thing, what *I* want to know is, *how's the leg?*"

Miss Mary turned her back abruptly that she might indulge her smiling without offence. "The boys' old nurse," she whispered. "Always took Roy's part. Against Jim and all the world. She would even defy Uncle James for Roy's sake. If anybody wants to make

a friend of Joanna for life, they've only got to let her talk to them about Roy."

Camilla dearly longed to make a friend for life.

But Roy had broken away as Tina and Lenox and Harrington came down the colonnade.

"Ye've seen Misther English?" Joanna's voice followed the fleeing Roy. "Not been to the stables! Look at that now! Whatever John English'll be saying, I don't know."

"Scotland and Ireland's all I've got time for," Roy called back. "Small and insignificant as they are, I can't cover all the British Isles in ten minutes. Tell that to English!"

They heard Mrs. Callahan's laughing: "Sure I'll be kapin' yer impidence to m'self, and not fur the furrst time!"

Roy had hailed the others: "Say! that's not the way to the new swimming pool."

Tina answered that she was taking Robert to the racquet court, "unless"—she stopped—"unless you're going to show Camilla the gallery now."

He wasn't going to give them more than five minutes, he said—they could spend it as they pleased.

Then came that piece of legerdemain which so bewildered Camilla at the time. Leroy answering questions, tossing out others, hurrying his party along corridors, stopped at a door which he held open. Mary and Tina went in first, and the door was closed without a sound behind Harrington and Robert. Leroy turned silent, as swift as a wild animal, and drew Camilla into a darkened passage. "Quick!" he said. Another door opened and shut. She was in a room so dark that she could distinguish nothing. Her heart had jumped into her throat . . . instinctively she put her hand up. He seemed to divine some motion on her part.

"Don't move, not on your life!" he whispered. "I don't want anybody else in here." They stood as still as

mice till all the sounds behind them died. Then, walking very softly on the polished floor, he crossed the room to what now, with eyes growing used to the dimness, appeared as a curtainless but shuttered window. He laboured with a stiff catch, swore softly under his breath, and finally raised the sash. He opened the outside shutter only a crack, as though afraid his presence might be detected from outside. But the crack was all-sufficient. A strong ray of light shot in and revealed the room—small, white-panelled, every picture and every piece of furniture shrouded.

"Sh!" he said, as though Camilla had spoken. With great precaution against noise, he got a heavy holland-covered chair in front of the fender. Balanced with a foot on either arm of the chair, he was able to loosen and draw aside the covering from a life-size portrait in oils over the mantelpiece. A white-satin figure of a lady leaning a little forward out of a high carved seat. She held a half-open Watteau fan against her breast, and over it she smiled out at her visitors.

He had come back to where Camilla was, and stood beside her. "My mother."

"She is very beautiful." Camilla turned from the lady to her son. There was something in his face she hadn't noticed before, or thought possible. A curious sulky sadness. What made him look like that, she wondered.

"That was done before my brother was born. *I* never saw her so happy as that." He spoke of it as a grievance. "But she *was* beautiful."

"I wish she was here," Camilla found herself saying.

And then he voiced Mrs. Sambourne's sentiment with regard to Linda's mother. "If she'd been here—things might have been different." Then his gaiety came back. "I don't need her so much now." He glanced at the face beside him. "Why don't you ask why?"

"Well, why?"

"Because you're here."

Now he is going to kiss me, she thought, and the world swung out in space. But Leroy stood there looking at her, as motionless as the painted form of his mother.

Voices!—the others on their track. Leroy made a quick movement towards the opposite door. But he glanced up at the face on the wall and seemed to take from it his orders. He climbed on the chair again, and replaced the cover, tucking it carefully in. It all took time. And he *had* time, it seemed—time for everything except—

Now he was closing the shutter. Darkness. A wonderful palpitant dark. She imagined him coming nearer, nearer—she fancied she could hear him breathing. She started. What was that? The window being shut down! Still wasting time with the window. "Don't hurt yourself against that table; wait till I open the door," he said. But she didn't wait. She could distinguish all too clearly the figure with its back to her making towards the door. Slowly she followed him—with a sense of failure, of humiliation—as though she had offered herself and been rejected.

Before he got to the door she knew she would give years of her life if he had kissed her.

Had it been her fault?

"Stiffness."

Or perhaps she wasn't the kind.

Linda.

He'd have kissed Linda.

. . . . . .

That door had brought them into the main hall.

The others looked at her curiously.

"So *that's* where you've been!" Tina said laughing.

CHAPTER V

MISS MARY hadn't said a word. But she had looked many things. When Leroy had gone to see about the automobile, she slipped her hand through Camilla's arm. "Come and look at the Japanese ivories while we wait."

They stood in front of a great gold lac cabinet, pretending to look in.

Miss Mary glanced sideways. "What makes you so silent?" she said, as though Camilla were commonly anything else.

"Oh, am I?" she said nervously. "Perhaps I was wondering who the Linda is they were talking about."

"Oh!"—Miss Mary looked at her queerly—"you want to know *that,* do you?"

"Well, . . . not specially. Certainly not if there's any reason . . ." She drew back into her shell.

"Why are you so touchy, so embarrassed?" A flash of panic had crossed Mary Sambourne's face. At the bidding of an irresistible impulse, prudence deserted her. "I suppose Leroy tried to kiss you, in there?"

Camilla's indignation could hardly have been more convincing if she hadn't prayed in her heart that Leroy might do just that. "Of *course* not! How could you suppose? . . . I'm not that kind!" She brought it out as proudly as a few minutes before she had said the same thing to herself with an aching humbleness.

"No, no!" Miss Mary seemed to apologize. "It was only that you looked so odd. And asked about Linda."

"Well, you know him and I don't. But would he be likely to go kissing—trying to kiss other girls when"—(in her burning need to know more, Camilla developed the wisdom of the serpent)—"when he's engaged to Linda?"

"He's *not* engaged."

(God be praised! She was spared that, even if he hadn't kissed her.)

After a moment. "*He* didn't tell you they were engaged, did he?" Miss Mary asked sternly.

"He didn't talk to me about such things. Why should he?"

In the recoil from sharp anxiety Miss Mary became genial, confidential. "You're almost like one of us. There's no reason *you* shouldn't know. Naturally we don't want a girl of *that* sort in the family. But, apart from our feelings, Leroy deserves a better fate."

"Is she so—?"

Miss Mary nodded significantly. "One of those Cincinnati Ballards. Always in hot water." She spoke with a relish that betrayed her relief in being able to denounce the Ballards unchecked. "Linda's brother spent half a million and ran horribly into debt before he drank himself to death. Her father was responsible for the failure of the firm of Deacon & Ballard. They're the kind that must have money, no matter how they get it. Her sister, the other Ballard girl, married a frightfully rich Westerner of some unproducible sort, and Linda gets all she can out of them. Gets a good deal. But extravagant? Beyond anything you ever dreamed. Linda takes presents from anybody. Takes money from men. Awful to think of a woman like that getting hold of—" She stopped short as though appalled at the prospect.

Camilla, through her own dismay, had a momentary glimpse of the fact that Mrs. Sambourne wasn't taking the beautiful care of Leroy that Miss Mary was. Mrs. Sambourne was willing, apparently, to see him delivered over to Linda. Miss Mary thought of everything. She was devoutly hoping, now, that the Linda gossip wouldn't reach Uncle James. It might be fatal. "He and Roy have only been reconciled about a year. His father's really immensely proud of Roy. Uncle James says he never in all his experience knew any young man who

grasped things quicker, or had more the instinct for *les affaires,*" Miss Mary said, in that new foreign way of hers. She was looking at it, now, from Uncle James's point of view. "Roy could easily, *if he liked,* in a few years, Uncle James says, he could be the controlling financial mind in this country. Imagine, Leroy!"

"Is she pretty?"

Miss Mary set her lips. Then she opened them to say, "Yes—in a way. A man's way. Good figure. Looks well on horseback. That's how Leroy came across her again. The horsey set in Leicestershire took her up. She was supposed to be engaged to some Englishman. But I hear the Englishman's poor. At least, in comparison with . . . So now she has the impudence to go about saying that she's engaged to Leroy."

Out of the deeps: "Perhaps it is, that he isn't ready to tell you, just yet," Camilla suggested—and before Mary could answer, there he was, collecting them for the drive home.

Yes, he was engaged to Linda, and *that* was why he hadn't—

This time he sat outside with the driver.

There was much less general chatter, going, than coming. Harrington told her a long, disjointed story about camping out in Arizona. Camilla sat with eyes on the square-shouldered figure by the chauffeur. When the head turned a little her heart beat as if Leroy had called her—though the turning was only to say: "Left! Bad corner here, on the right." She was struck suddenly by something severe about the face which had escaped her before. Then the impression was wiped out, remembering what he looked like when he said those amazing words "Because *you're* here!" Was that only flirting? Something in her told her, whatever it was, it wasn't *that.* In spite of her acceptance of the Linda theory, she kept on dropping Linda out of the immediate account between herself and Roy, kept on going back to those min-

utes in the white boudoir—to those seconds, above all, in the dark. He hadn't wanted to kiss her. Hadn't thought of it. . . . Over and over, all the way back to New York, she lived again through the inexplicable little scene.

If it had "just happened like that"—any one of the lovers in the novels would have seized the happy chance. But deliberately to create the opportunity, and then to turn his back on it. Oh, it couldn't mean but one thing!

She sat on the ship's deck ten years after, conscious that she was feeling it to this hour—after all she had gone through since—feeling again the terrible tumbling sensation of the fall from that high place he'd set her on, with "Because *you're* here"—down, down to earth's deepest pit of hopelessness. He never even *thought* of it! she said to herself as the car rushed along the mighty river. I'm not the kind.

Well, one thing at least was clear. She couldn't go on with this visit. She devised plans for its abrupt termination. How could she get through dinner? She couldn't. There'd be a telegram from her father when she got back. He wanted her at once. Behind this playing at escape was the picture of the reprieve she could surely count on—when the penitential drive should come to an end. She lived for the moment when she could go away from all these light-hearted people and be alone in her room—that room that Mrs. Sambourne felt Linda ought to have! Camilla saw herself leaving them all down in the hall and hurrying upstairs. She would lock the door. Then she could throw herself on the bed and lie with her face hidden and cry, Roy! Roy! into the pillow.

The dream was too flattering. When she reached her bedroom door, Tina came in too—on pretence of restoring two gold hat-pins she'd borrowed. She stood talking and taking off her things. "Don't you just love that house? Aunt Marion, they say, had the most perfect taste. It's Uncle James who goes crowding in all those things that don't 'belong.' "

Like her stepsister she seemed to resent Camilla's silence. "Well?" she looked up, as she jabbed the last of the pins into the cushion, "and what do you think of our cousin?"

"I've seen him before"—Camilla presented the fact as if she hoped it would excuse her from a re-valuation. But Tina's mischievous face was lifted waiting.

"He looked more like seventeen, then, than twenty-one. Now . . . he looks older than twenty-six."

"Not surprising," Tina laughed. "A great deal has happened in these five years." There was something so slighting in Tina's tone that Camilla, greatly to her own surprise, found herself saying, "Yes—the war has happened, poor fellow!"

Tina stared at that "poor fellow," and then dropped her eyes on her aimless fingers pulling pins out of the cushion, and sticking them in again. "The war? Yes, and a great deal else." She hesitated, and then with a kind of deliberate brusqueness, "Of course, I don't know what he said to you when he carried you off this afternoon—"

"What he said?"

"Or did, come to that."

"He did *nothing*—except show me a picture."

"Oh! very well, you needn't look so outraged. I should think you were the only girl Leroy had ever had in a dark room without trying to—"

"Well, then, I *am* that girl."

"Glad there's one," Tina mocked as she left her pin sticking and went towards the door. "But it wouldn't be fair not to tell you there isn't a greater flirt in all New York than Roy Trenholme."

"Yes," said Camilla with a twist at her heart, "I know."

"Just so you know, it's all right. We've seen him like this more times than we can count."

. . . . . .

I am one of the people who is never going to be happy, she said in her heart. How horribly long life was for people like that. She drooped with the fatigue of it. Should she ring and say she wasn't coming down—didn't want any dinner? Heavens! they'd be swarming into her room, Mary and Tina and Mrs. Sambourne, with questions and remedies—

"Remedies!" She shook her head at herself in the glass. Other girls got in and out of love as easily as they got in and out of their clothes. Camilla wasn't supple enough for that. As he had said, too "stiff." They might malign him as much as they liked. Leroy was the man she was meant for. If she wasn't the girl "meant for him," why, there was a "fault" in the bed rock of life—her life anyway. "Remedies?" God Himself, if He would remedy her ill, would have to go back to the foundation of the world and make His earth all over again.

Mr. Sambourne took her out to dinner and put her between himself and Harrington.

Leroy at the opposite end, between Miss Mary and a girl friend of Tina's whom Mr. Sambourne and Jim had met on the way back from the Park.

Leroy seemed to know this Miss Pansy Dillon too. They were very gay at that end.

Mr. Sambourne did his best with ready talk and pleasantries. He paid the kind of full-bodied compliments which at a less preoccupied time would have made for flushing and embarrassment. She accepted them tonight with a calm that much intrigued the man of the world.

"By George, she's seasoned already! Who's done it?" and thereupon questions. Was she really eighteen? —and where had she been spending her holidays while he'd been abroad and not able to look after her properly.

Harrington, too, on his side, was living up to the high family standard of agreeableness. When he couldn't find out what specially interested her, he did the next

best thing, talked about what specially interested him. He had brought to his profession of architect a very real enthusiasm. He talked about his plans with the shining looks, the eagerness of a lover. Camilla caught Leroy's eye every now and then as it went from Harrington to her. Her wandering glance did not escape Harrington. He knew he wasn't good at describing, he said. He'd wait till he could show her an example of what the new men were trying to do in this country. Did she like dancing? Then he'd make up a party and take her to see the new ballet. And the moment she'd done with school she must come to their camp in the Adirondacks. "Mustn't she, father?" "Can you swim? I tell you what, I'll teach you—" And so on for countless thousands of years, while, at the other end of the table, Pansy Dillon made eyes at Leroy—very, very beautiful eyes.

In the parlour after dinner Leroy left the group of which Pansy was the scintillant centre, and came across the room at a moment when Harrington had left Camilla to get an Indian lance-head out of the cabinet.

Leroy bent down at Camilla's side to pick up a glove she had dropped. "Give me time," he whispered. "If you should care for anybody but me, I'm damned for ever."

When she recovered her breath, "How can you talk like that?" she said gravely, "when you're engaged."

He stared, and then in his quick way: "If I am engaged, I can only say it must be to you. I was feeling exactly like that myself."

She caught her breath. "I . . . I don't like joking about such things."

He bent down: "How serious do you give me leave to be?" And there was Harrington pushing in between them, holding out several objects on his palm. She stood up with a feeling of extraordinary insecurity in her knees, a sense of instability in all hitherto firm things, and looked at Harrington's Indian flints: Yes, she liked them.

"Nonsense!" Leroy said, "she doesn't like them at all."

The two men argued, pretending hostility. "She *can't* care about looking at things like that. She's only saying she does to please you. Well, if it wasn't true, let her say *why* she liked them!"

"Because—because they've lasted so long."

They laughed at her, and carried her off with the rest to the billiard room. She didn't play billiards? Oh, she *must* play billiards. Leroy would teach her.

They were never alone a minute. Yet had they been by themselves in a desert, though he might have said other things, he could hardly have conveyed more than he did, as he passed her from time to time going round the billiard table, or in bending over to show her how to hold her cue. "Bring it here, and let me chalk it for you!"—then a single sentence, or just a phrase. . . . His ingenuity in communication was a sort of legerdemain to the candid soul. And, heavens! the conviction he could throw into the wildest extravagance. He told her the most amazing things about herself—things that made her hot and exultant, things that gave her a sensation of dizziness. Oh, yes, the pace was terrific! You had to hold your head on with both hands.

. . . . . .

When bed-time came Harrington pressed his plan for the next day—a plan to motor over to Orange, where his firm was building "a splashin'" fine country house. American architecture in these days—well, she'd just see.

Leroy poured scorn on the project. "Of all the bor-ing—"

"Well, if it bores you, old fellow, there's a cure for that. Don't come."

"But I've got to come—if Camilla does."

"'Camilla!'" echoed Miss Mary, laughing and rais-ing her eyebrows.

"And why have you got to come if Camilla does?"

"Because it's the custom—when people are engaged."

Their towering amazement—her own out-topping theirs. "*Are* you engaged?"

"She says so," said Leroy.

"Oh, Le—Mr.—I never said—"

"Now, now! didn't you tell me, sitting on that chair in there by the piano not two hours ago, that you didn't see how I could talk like that when I was engaged?" He waited while she struggled with a paralysed tongue. "And didn't I say that I'd just been growing conscious of a very engaged sort of feeling myself, and I was glad you agreed?"

Everybody laughed except Camilla and Miss Mary. Looking round, Leroy went on: "You appreciate now the cruelty of the general behaviour tonight. I haven't had a moment alone with her since we were engaged. Here you all are now, standing round us and making us feel shy—don't they make us shy, Camilla?—so shy, I'm not daring to say good night to you. Not properly, that is." He held out his hand, and Camilla fled upstairs out of a shower of laughter.

Tina stopped her, with arms out, barring the way.

"It's bad enough," said Leroy, looking over the banisters, "without all this chaperoning, to be engaged to somebody who scares you as much as she scares me."

"Scares you, does she?" Mr. Sambourne was chuckling.

"I should pretty nearly think she did. I'm more scared of my future wife, than I ever was of anybody in my life. Bad beginning, hey? Right! Come back and reassure me, Camilla. No? Good night then. I hope you'll sleep well. I know I shan't."

. . . . . .

This unnerving flippancy was perhaps worst of all. He couldn't mean anything—talking like that before every one.

So she told herself.

But her body refused to believe her mind.

She lay awake, thrilling, wondering, loving.

. . . . . .

CHAPTER VI

AT about six in the morning, a faint sound like a mouse scratching. In the act of sitting up in bed to stare about, she saw a corner of white paper move towards her from under the door. An envelope! She sat a long while staring at it, before she gathered courage to get out of bed and pick it up.

"Miss Camilla Charlton."

She got back into bed shaking with excitement, and held the envelope against her for several minutes before she opened it. There was no Dear—anything, at the top. It began "bang in the middle," as Leroy usually did.

It only seems sudden to us because we weren't in the secret till yesterday. We didn't know that life, all this time, ever since we were born—before we were born, was leading us to that moment when you looked up at the window and found me looking out for you.

It isn't I, that tell you to love me. It's something infinitely greater. Aren't you feeling that too, Camilla?

Oh, that "best-of-all letter!" What did it matter that long, long it had been ashes? It had been printed on her heart when her heart was very tender, very young. Roy wasn't satisfied with pointing out that it had been decreed from the Beginning that she must love him—

Swear you'll love me for ever. The moment you stopped loving me I should want to die. For ever and for ever, Your Leroy.

. . . . . .

For ever.

. . . . . .

She went in to get Miss Mary to go to breakfast with her. The bell hadn't rung, but Miss Mary had gone. Tina hadn't, mercifully. On the summons they made

their way down together. Tina behaved well . . . as though nothing extraordinary had happened.

Leroy was in the breakfast-room with Miss Mary and Mrs. Sambourne. He was laughing, and so were they at something he'd been reading out of the paper. "Listen to this, Camilla!" As if she could listen to something in a newspaper! But she stood with a receptive air, hoping that she wasn't looking as if she thought anything particular had happened the night before. And *had* anything particular happened? "We've seen him like this more times than we can count," Tina had said. They all took that outburst on the stairs for Roy's nonsense. Ah! but *they* didn't know about the letter. And, indeed, in the light of common day, Camilla mightn't herself have "known," but for the letter safe and warm at her heart.

Half-way through the meal Harrington began again about going to Orange.

"Oh! say, put it off till tomorrow," Roy said in the tone of one appealing to the dictates of reason.

Harrington with a stubborn look asked, "Why tomorrow?" He was told "the Governor'll be back tomorrow. This morning we are going to ride—" He turned to Camilla: "I've ordered the horses for ten. That do?"

Camilla sent an agitated glance scouting round for counsel. Miss Mary was watching her stepmother. Mrs. Sambourne had fixed her husband with a mandatory look not lost upon the gentleman.

"We shouldn't dream of letting you run off with Camilla," he said pleasantly. "Anyhow, Harrington and I have arranged to take her to Orange. You can come if you are good."

"She told *me* she wanted to ride!" and Camilla's widened eyes convicted Leroy so publicly of fibbing, that everybody laughed.

"Your horses, my dear Roy!" his aunt shook her head.

"I shouldn't have a moment's peace. You see, we are responsible for Camilla till her father comes back."

Leroy turned to her. "Let's telegraph your father, shall we?"

"To know if Camilla may go riding at ten?" Miss Mary answered for her.

As they rose from the table Mrs. Sambourne asked the girl if she remembered the pewter on the fine old Jacobean dresser between the windows. "It used to be in the wash-house closet at your grandfather's. There was a cartload of it—"

Mrs. Sambourne put her arm through Camilla's and drew her aside as the others went their several ways. All except Roy. He lingered near the door, whistling softly as he took some letters out of his pocket and opened them with a careless finger, tearing the envelopes raggedly.

"The niggers are so grand now," Mrs. Sambourne went on; "they must have china in these days, Colonel Charlton says. So he gave us enough of the pewter for that dresser. Camilla!" The girl's wandering attention came back with a start, at her sharply whispered name. "What is this about Leroy and you?"

"What is it?" the girl repeated. They looked at each other.

"It was a surprise to Mary that you had ever met him before."

"Yes," said Camilla with a safe economy.

"We are all devoted to Leroy—but—"

The slight movement of withdrawal on the part of the girl was warning enough, answer enough. "Anyhow, today I think you'd better let Granger and Hal take you to Orange—"

"I should like that," said Camilla, with marked absence of enthusiasm. Two maids came in and bustled about. Mrs. Sambourne abandoned the pewter pretence and led the way into the hall.

Roy still there, tearing up letters and throwing the pieces into a great waist-high Indian basket.

"Ready now?" he looked round. "We'll go in here and write our telegrams."

When Camilla had passed silently in, he made as if to shut the library door. "Oh, I beg your pardon, Aunt Rosamond!" He stood aside as Mrs. Sambourne came in.

"Here are the blanks," she said, and stood talking about predilection in the matter of pens.

"Oh! any old pen'll do for *me!*" He seized the first to his hand and made a pass with it. "Clear the decks," he seemed to say. The lady, far from clearing, continued to cumber the ground. She opened the morning paper; stood there, and with marked—one might say offensive—deliberation she sent her eye up and down the columns. Roy, in turn, sent his eye up and down the intrusive person. Something about his aunt in this new light struck him as funny. To Camilla, at the fire, he observed in a stage whisper: "She learnt this in the effete monarchies of Europe—this distrust of her kind."

Mrs. Sambourne seemed not to hear.

"Come along, Camilla!" He seated himself at the writing table and began, "*George Charlton, Steam Yacht Aloha, Old Point Comfort.* Now what?"

Camilla could think of nothing but what Mrs. Sambourne must be thinking.

Not that it mattered, for Roy wasn't bothering any longer about the lady. "You'd better say:

"*Am going to marry* (to economize the 'I' shows our heads aren't turned) *Am going to marry Leroy Trenholme. Please send approval care Sambourne and say when to expect you.* Now sign it." He held out the pen.

Camilla hung there, half-way between the fire and the writing table. Over the top of the *Tribune* she caught

Mrs. Sambourne's eyes. "Things can't go so quick," the girl brought out.

"Why can't they?" He jumped up. Under the older woman's nose he took Camilla's hand, and drew her into the bay of the window. "Things have got to go quick if they're to 'go' at all," he said in his headlong fashion. "Can *you* stand all these eyes pecking at us? I can't. That was why I broke loose last night. I saw if I didn't do or say something *quick,* to make them blink—shut up, you know—they'd go on for weeks *pecking at us.*" He repeated his phrase with indignation and then, with a glint in the direction of his aunt, "Got rid of all but one now."

"Yes, but still," Camilla protested very low, "last night—what a thing to say!"

"The *right* thing. The only thing. If I hadn't, we'd have been weeks, *months* getting past all those barriers you'd be wanting to set up—yes, *you* too!"

"What barriers?" Camilla said in the same charged undertone.

"God knows. But you'd find 'em. And I'd be helpless, because it's true what I said about your scaring me. The first time I saw you, yesterday, though I knew instantly what you meant, you gave me buck fever. Don't know what buck fever is? Well, it's what some hunters get the first time they see a buck. Sort of paralysed feeling your greenhorn has—old hand, too, sometimes, that's the worst of it—at the very moment when he's taking aim at his grizzly or his tiger—whatever it is he's got to bring down. Awful feeling of: 'Suppose I miss?' You can hear your bones being crunched . . . and your hand goes dead. And that second makes all the difference. You just *haven't* stopped the brute in time. But you're dead in your own mind before he gets his claws in you. 'Tain't nice—buck fever."

"Did *you* ever have it?" she asked, staring at a dread-

ful scene—Roy with only one charge left, confronting an infuriated wild animal.

"Oh! yes . . . twice. Once when I was seventeen and they got me up on my legs to make an after-dinner speech. Everything in you just *stops* for that second. I tell you buck fever makes you weak as a baby. That's what you did to me. And you'd have gone on giving me buck fever if I hadn't just rammed the charge in, and blazed away before they could wink. But you mustn't go on scaring me like that—or I'll go and die of buck fever."

He laughed, and then grave again—"Oh, you beautiful!" he lifted the hand he held, and pressed it against his lips.

Camilla's startled eyes met Mrs. Sambourne's a second time over the open newspaper.

"Oh, she won't mind this," Roy said in a loud, cheerful tone. "Aunt Rosamond's accustomed to this in the exalted company she keeps abroad." Then his voice sunk to a whisper against her hand. "The real truth is, I couldn't wait. I wanted you to know. *You* weren't sorry. Can you say you were sorry?"

It appeared she couldn't.

"Well, my dear, have you reached a decision?" Mrs. Sambourne's cool voice, and the deliberate crackling of the paper, sounded strangely loud. "If it isn't to be Orange we must let them know."

It was Orange after all. Leroy went too. He insisted on having Jim of the party, and made the boy infinitely happy by prevailing on the chauffeur to let him drive after they got on the straight New Jersey roads. Boys usually took to Leroy, but if he had laid a plot the more completely to subjugate the girl, to give her ecstatic glimpses of the future, he couldn't have done fairer, as the saying is, than be so perfectly delightful to Jim. At the end of that excursion to Orange Jim would have died for Cousin Leroy.

They lunched with some friends, and then, with maddening slowness, they went all over the big, elaborate country house of which Harrington would spare them no single aspect, or detail. In the upper hall Leroy detained Camilla a moment on the pretext: "Oh! I've got a telegram I'd like to show you." And when he unfolded it, she saw that it was the one he had written out for her and which she had signed. "You never sent it!"

"Did you think I'd part with the signed contract?" He kissed her name, and put the paper back in his pocket. "That was a waste, I admit, when I've got you." The *banalité* was lifted up, glorified, not by the happiness only, but, as so often before, by the sheer beauty of his face.

On her own initiative Camilla had telegraphed to her sister Julia. She found the answer that evening when they got back:

Loving congratulations. Leaving for New York Saturday. Julia.

Dinner had to be postponed to give the Orange party time to dress. And they sat so long at the table that the evening was far spent when at last they came out into the hall. With an air that seemed to deter the objector, Leroy took possession of Camilla. He guided her to the sofa in the corner of the hall.

"This is the half-way station." He planted himself in front of her. When the others, warned, perhaps, by the advertisement of that "cold" shoulder, had passed on, Leroy sat down with a triumphant smile. "Halfway to the library. If it was anybody but you, I'd take you there straight"; and then, aghast at the unconscious admission of the many others and the different methods, he looked down at the unsuspecting face.

"Oh, no, not the library!" she said.

"Why not?"

"We must go in a minute and help with the singing."

"I'm damned if I'll help with the singing! Or let you." He allowed that to sink in, then: "We've got our affairs to settle."

"We can't settle anything till father comes."

Well, they would give Mr. Charlton time to get here. But Leroy'd be hanged, and drawn and quartered, if he'd wait for Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley.

Camilla stared. What on earth did he mean?

"I'll bet she's the kind of woman that won't travel straight through. Stays all night at Jacksonville."

Well, yes, they all did that.

"Very well, then, she'll be too late for the wedding!"

Camilla gasped.

He seized her hand and crushed it. "I'm so horribly afraid something might happen—haven't an idea *what,*" he added hastily—"but *something.*" Then in that dreadful way he had of drubbing the romance out of what he'd been saying—"the thought of losing you makes me bellow in my sleep."

She longed to tell him: You won't lose me, but instead of that, "You see," she began in grave haste, "there's so much—"

"Don't begin on clothes."

"I wasn't going to."

"Well, what is there so much of?"

"So much for us both to know. Specially for me." She raised her eyes. "Tell me about you."

"What is it you want to know?" he spoke a little brusquely. But that might have been because the head of Harrington Sambourne had appeared craning out of the parlour door.

"Come and sing, Camilla."

"She can't."

"Why not?"

"Because I won't let her."

Harrington forced out a laugh, shrugged and disappeared.

"The nerve of some people!" Leroy's eyes caught on the violets pinned at her belt. "*I* didn't send you those."

"No, Mr. Sambourne."

"The *old* man?"

"He isn't so old."

"Old enough to know better."

"I loved your lilies," she said, thinking to soothe him, "but I thought I ought to wear what my host sent me."

"Host! What's a host compared to—? Listen, darling," he slipped his arm behind her. "You are never, never to wear any flowers but mine." She had no answer, and no more than astonished looks, when he took Mr. Sambourne's violets out of her belt and dropped them behind the sofa back.

He looked fixedly at her for a moment. Then he took her face in his hands and kissed her.

Even then, no word; but she was trembling as she stood up.

"No, no!" he whispered thickly, his hand on her arm. "Be good. I won't. I'll try not to do it—*for a while,*" he added, with a suppressed laugh. "Come, sit down."

Slowly she sat back into her seat.

"What is it you were wanting to know?"

"About you."

"What about me?"

"Everything."

He gave her a sharp look. "Oh! you want to know everything?"

She glanced up at him with surprise. "You *want* me to, don't you?"

"Well, I'm not so sure!" He made a comic face. "Everything's a large order. For one thing, takes up such a lot of time. Why should we bother about things that are done with? *We've* got the future!" he triumphed.

But he did speak of his father—with curt approval and an undertone of something more than respect. ("Heavens!" thought Camilla, "if Roy is afraid of Mr. Trenholme, what shall I be?") "My father's the only person I've ever known whose opinion I've cared *that* about."

"Didn't you care—?"

But he didn't wait. "I suppose what you want to know about is the women."

She winced inwardly at the plural, and then forgot the jar in listening to the story of the ferryman's daughter—the girl he was in love with when he was fifteen. She married an undergardener. Then there was Luella Featherstone. One of those Atlantic Liner girls that haven't got any business on land.

"Why haven't they?"

"Search me! All I know is, the minute they step off the gang-plank"—he pursed his lips and blew out an imaginary match.

Camilla contemplated this phenomenon with a wide-eyed gravity that threw Leroy into contortions of laughter. "You are *too* beautiful!"—he was driven to gather her into his arms. She was so intensely still that he drew away a little the better to see the face he had kissed. "Can't you understand," he whispered, "what it is after all the racket to find *you*? It's like coming out of one of our blazing banging engine shops, into my blue-grass field down in Kentucky. Only horses about. Nice silent creatures with satin coats and soft eyes. Plenty of mettle, too. I'm sure *you've* got mettle."

Camilla considered the point with misgiving. "I'm afraid—"

"If you're *roused*. The thing is you've never been roused."

"You haven't told me yet—!" she began.

He slurred very lightly over the Isabelle "episode." It had been nothing more and it was ended.

"And where—where does"—she overcame a difficulty —"where does Linda Ballard come in?"

He laughed. "What have they been telling you about Linda?"

"They say—" She had it all arranged in her mind in a neat little pile, as a housewife gathers together dust and rubbish. Camilla was therefore unexpectedly ready to throw out the Linda sweepings: "They say she takes money from men—and tells lies—and—"

"Mary told you that," he interrupted. "Aunt Rosamond is fairer to Linda. But why are we wasting time over irrelevant people?"

So Linda was "irrelevant." As if to call her so wasn't enough, the relevant person was being kissed.

All questioning shrivelled, and fears fell away.

"Leroy!" Mrs. Sambourne was standing there.

"Yes?"

"I think some one of us ought, at least, to send a little message to meet Linda down at the docks, don't you? What ship is she taking?"

"How should I know?"

"Oh, I thought you naturally—"

Faint, far off, a bell sounded. The front-door knocker was sharply struck. They all three looked around. "Now, who on earth is that at this time of night?" Mrs. Sambourne demanded. Leroy sat strangely still—waiting. They all three waited. "What makes my heart beat so?" Camilla wondered. A servant came out of the dining-room and went to the door. "Suppose," thought Camilla, "suppose Mrs. Sambourne's letter is too late. Suppose it's Linda—"

A man stood there explaining that this had been left next door by mistake. He handed in an envelope.

Mrs. Sambourne, in the act of moving forward to take it, threw out: "She usually travels by the Cunard, doesn't she?"

Roy said he hadn't the least idea. He looked sharply at the envelope in Mrs. Sambourne's hand.

"Well, I think I'll *try* Cunard." She paused at the library door and opened the telegram.

"She's a wasp, that Courtesy-Aunt of mine!" Leroy whispered between his teeth.

"Oh! it's for Miss Charlton," the Courtesy-Aunt was saying.

The telegram was from Mr. Charlton: "Returning tomorrow night." Camilla scanned the words a trifle anxiously. He *might* have added something kind. But Leroy had recovered his buoyant spirits.

"*Splendid!* This time tomorrow—" he seized her hand again—"this time tomorrow night it will all be arranged." She knew she would have been in his arms again but for the Courtesy-Aunt, and the others, who came pouring out of the parlour, on the way to bed. "Tomorrow night!" he repeated the last thing.

She carried upstairs the sensation—and it kept coming back again and again—as of a person lightly, unsuitably clad, being whirled along in a racing car, with the wind sweeping back hair and laces—nearly blowing your head off. You tried to hold it on—tried so hard, you lost hold upon your thoughts. They went streaming out to the four quarters of the world. And you, dizzy with the flicker of the fences and the flying landscape, too confused to take in spoken words, were conscious only that the most glorious part of your life was madly cinematographing by.

The first pause in this breathless pace seemed to come with the news that awaited Camilla at the breakfast-table, when she came down next morning.

A telephone message from Mr. Trenholme.

"Leroy off like that!" Mr. Sambourne showed his white teeth in a mocking smile. Harder than ever, now, to catch that early worm before he went down town.

Camilla wanted to know why it was harder.

"Well, my dear, formerly James Trenholme used to ride in the morning. Then he found that he could keep himself in condition by doing some pettifogging exercises. He couldn't get anything of a ride, and change, in less than an hour-and-a-half to two hours. His horrible exercises only take fifteen minutes. So he's at the office anywhere from seventy-five minutes earlier than he used to be. Shouldn't wonder if he were a trifle longer getting off this morning. Long enough to put a spoke in my gentleman's wheel!" Mr. Sambourne chuckled as he looked at Camilla. All the talk of the table circled round the father and son who had come together after an alienation that had tried them both.

"Specially Roy," Miss Mary thought. "I remember a talk with him after he'd done his best to see his father, and been rebuffed. It was the only time in my life I ever saw tears in Roy's eyes."

"Yes, they're a funny pair," Hal said. "Both of 'em hard as nails really!"

Mr. Sambourne contested that. "There's a soft spot in every Trenholme. But selfish—!"

Camilla asked for instances. The instances didn't convince her. "I don't call *that* selfish."

They laughed at her for defending a man so extremely well able to defend himself.

"Not here he isn't. He doesn't seem to have a friend." She looked round the table.

"Except Camilla!"

"Oh!" said Mr. Sambourne, "I suppose you think you'll understand that Sphinx?"

"Better than some," she said with astonishing confidence.

But Mr. Sambourne reiterated: "Yes, selfish. And jealous; with the worst sort of jealousy." What was the worst? The silent sort. That had been the trouble between James Trenholme and his wife. He got it into

his head . . . "Foolishness, pure, unadulterated foolishness," Mr. Sambourne said. "Never a better woman born. But I've always believed James broke her spirit. A ruthless beggar! He'd like to treat the people he disagrees with as he treats strikers. If James makes up his mind to put a spoke in your wheel, God help you!"

Suppose he's putting in a spoke this minute! Camilla kept thinking, as one half-hour went after another.

Oh yes, the mere thought of Leroy's father put on the brake.

On pretext of writing to Lucy, Camilla had escaped to her room. She sat with empty hands, recalling all she had ever heard of this man whose hatred of publicity was no make-weight in the scale as against public curiosity. Camilla's knowledge up to now was only that which no one could escape who read the newspapers. Through that medium, too, she, in common with all the world, was familiar with his face. It frightened her to think of his face. That it should have some faint resemblance to his son's, was a libel, an obscure menace. It was Leroy on a smaller, meaner scale to start with. Leroy with the glorious youth drained out of him, the contours sharpened, the eyes narrowed till they shut out joy. The mouth—oh! the mouth was terrible, above all. A steel trap that had snapped upon its victim.

Poor Leroy!

CHAPTER VII

SHE sat on the deck of the *Mauritania* after all that had come and gone, living over that morning, envisaging the meeting between father and son more vividly now, by the light of her later knowledge, than she had been able to do even when Leroy came back and poured it out hot and hot—his first essay in the exercise he was to become so proficient in, up to a certain point—"telling Camilla." In the first flush of desire to merge their lives in one, he had meant to share with her every detail of that memorable quarter of an hour, without the smallest suppression or attentuation. He discovered an immense zest in the very thought of telling her things. He had gone on doing that long after . . . yes, long after. For sheer joy in his own power to rehabilitate the scene. Joy, too, in her gifts as good audience. But at this distance—she could see it all much clearer than at the time.

Mr. Trenholme, clean-shaven, thin-lipped, immaculate, sitting before the remains of his frugal meal in that room Camilla came to know so well. A room characteristically darker by day—with its oak walls and wine-coloured hangings—than by night in the flood of artificial light.

He sat now, on a grey morning, trying his eyes on the small print of a prospectus which he had opened after going through the heap of private letters at his elbow. As he looked over his rimless pince-nez at the tall son swinging in, only the very observant would see the slight quickening in that keen look. Camilla learned to know it well. It was the look he kept for Leroy.

"Well, father!"

"How goes?"

"A.1." Leroy threw down his hat with an air of

greater ease than he felt. He acknowledged that, to Camilla, afterwards. "Dead sure he'd shy and buck me off." So he had walked up and down on the other side of the table at which his father sat, and spoke lightly about the trouble he'd been having with his wound. Then, just as he thought he was going to introduce the subject of Camilla, *he* did the "shying," and found himself asking about the results of his father's trip. Was the political Boss out there—he named the man who afterwards held such sway over Leroy's public manifestations—was McCoy going to help or hinder?

Mr. Trenholme thought McCoy had the sense to see which side his bread was buttered on. There was every likelihood of McCoy's putting pressure on Congress to grant the concession. "The line," he said, "will be broad gauge and will go—but come down to the office." He laid hands on his letters, at the same time as he pushed back his chair. "I'll show you the maps and specifications"

"Oh! what's the rush?" Leroy, still wearing his overcoat, dropped into an arm-chair near the grimly splendid, fireless chimney-piece. "I haven't been home for four months."

"I should call that a good reason for getting into harness now you *are* home." His father spoke with a *brusquerie* almost rough. He stood half turned away, busily sorting and gathering up the papers by his plate.

"It isn't the way the galled horse looks at harness."

Only the eyes left the letters, not the hands. "What's the matter *now?*" Mr. Trenholme demanded.

He was told the fact was the wound had been behaving like the devil. Leroy went into details. His father's sympathy took the form of saying discontentedly that he'd been hoping his son would come back ready to shoulder "his share." The situation was extremely delicate, extremely interesting too—as Leroy would realize later. It was a good thing he'd come back, even if he

wasn't perfectly well. Two or three hours a day down at the office—he'd soon pick up the threads.

Any one could see how the man had lived for the return of this only son; how he had been mentally referring a thousand things to the alert young mind. But Leroy sat looking down at the pattern in the rug.

"I won't be any good for a month or two."

Something in his voice made his father look at him sharply. "What do you propose to *do* with your 'month or two'?"

"Well, as I can't do anything else, I propose to put in the time getting married."

"Oh, that's it!"

"You needn't look at me with that basilisk eye." ("I said it a whole heap more cheeky than I felt," he confessed to Camilla.) "You *ought* to be darn pleased."

Mr. Trenholme made a faint, inarticulate noise.

"I've found the right girl at last, Dad."

"Of course!" His thin lips closed like the two sides of a cut. You'd think they were for ever healed of speech. But they weren't. They were opened with a sharp "Who is it?"

Leroy told him.

His father stared. Leroy had a bad moment.

"Do you mean one of George Charlton's—?"

"Yes."

Still Mr. Trenholme stood with body half turned away, his wary eyes on Roy's face.

"Why are you so surprised?"

It turned out that he'd heard his son was making a fool of himself over one of those Ballards. "Bad blood, those Ballards. Though as to that—" he sighed and seemed to resign himself: "I might have known this would come again."

"It hasn't come again. Don't you think it. It's *never*—"

"No, no, of course not—never before."

Camilla could see just the kind of look Leroy had flung at his father. They were too much alike, in some ways, for their own good understanding.

The older man got up and rang the bell. "It can't be helped, I suppose." He spoke as one weary of the whirl.

Leroy was on his feet too. "Is it your idea I should never marry?"

"No, no!" His tone said he was too wise to look for miracles. "I should have thought you'd want— Men who've got less than you have to leave behind them, generally *want*—"

A servant came in with Mr. Trenholme's hat and fur-lined coat. Leroy took the coat, and shouldered the servant out of the way. The man had shut the door before either spoke again. Leroy began to tell one or two facts about the girl, only to interrupt himself: "When will you see her?"

"Oh, there's no hurry, I suppose?"

"Well, I don't propose to waste time hanging about." He told how Mr. Charlton was returning that afternoon. "We'll get the business over Monday or Tuesday, I should think."

"*Next* Monday?" His father's hand halted on its way to the hat.

"Well, why not?"

"Why, indeed? *She* isn't going to run risks!"

"She doesn't know it's going to be Monday. I wanted to see you first."

Mr. Trenholme set his hat on the table, and felt for his gloves. He appeared mollified to some extent.

"How long have you known her?"

"Oh, for years," Roy said airily. "She was at Mary Sambourne's school."

"What's your hurry, then—all of a sudden?"

"Hurry is I can't stand fooling round among a lot of people." He faced his father suddenly with an

appeal, as man to man: "What's the use of talking, Dad? You know how it is. When will you see her?"

"Oh! don't expect *me*"—he put out his hand and seized his hat. "*I* don't know anything about women. I shouldn't know a blessed bit more about this one after I'd met her than I do now. You say she's eighteen and healthy. Her family I know, and don't know anything against them—except that her father believes in Free Trade and her old fool of a grandfather votes the Democratic ticket."

"What are you doing tonight?"

"Why?"

"I'll bring her round tonight."

"What's the use? No, no! I'll see her at the wedding. Not that I shall 'see her' then, any more than you do now. No woman who knows her business ever *lets* you see her—till it's too late."

. . . . . .

The Sambournes' car drew up at Mr. Trenholme's door just as that gentleman had let himself in after a long day at the office.

Mrs. Sambourne gave Camilla's shoulder a sympathetic pat as the girl stepped out with a hand on Leroy's arm. He turned and ran briskly up the steps in front of her with—

"Hullo!—don't shut us out!"

A man in an overcoat faced about, the door knob in one hand and in the other a key on the end of a chain. Camilla's first impression was that his not speaking wasn't his fault. Those lips looked too tightly compressed ever to come open. But, making all due allowances, the tall man in the lobby, his pallor emphasized by the black astrachan collar to his coat, frightened the girl more than anybody had ever frightened her in her life. She heard Roy say "This is Camilla," and she stood with lifted face, clasping her big muff in her arms—clinging to it as though it were her only friend on earth.

Happily this most alarming father gave her time. Very deliberately he pulled off his glove. "How do you do?" Then he took off his hat. A Southerner would have done that before, she thought, and oddly the reflection seemed to give her a certain advantage. When, with Roy's help—Roy talking all the time—the overcoat had been disposed of, and Mr. Trenholme led the way into a great, inhuman-looking room, with many splendid and just one truly pleasant thing in it—a fire.

"Oh, you burn wood!" she said. "So do we."

"Better take off your coat."

Leroy saw to it.

Mr. Trenholme didn't seem to look at her at all. Oh, he wasn't liking her!

Leroy still did nearly all the talking.

"Is your father in town?" was one of the few things that was said directly to her.

"We expect to find him when we get back." Leroy explained there'd been a wreck on the line.

"Not father's train?" Camilla threw in hurriedly.

No, but it had delayed him.

"He *might* be there now, Roy," she said, making a faint motion of *do*-let-us-go and see *my* sort of parent.

"How are you going back?" Mr. Trenholme asked his son. On being told that Mrs. Sambourne was waiting for them he lifted his eyebrows faintly.

"Yes, Aunt Rosamond's turned into the most biffing old dragon you ever knew in your life."

In a slightly acidulated tone Mr. Trenholme said, "She must have changed, then, since I—"

"*Has* changed. Don't know what to make of her. He'd better come out and see for himself."

But Mr. Trenholme drew the line at coming out to see Aunt Rosamond. He went only as far as the parlour door, and then he put out a dry hand. It was the first time he seemed really to look at Camilla. "You are taking on a fairly serious job," he said.

She smiled.

"You don't believe me? Well, I'm sorry for you."

The two objects of pity laughed delightedly. This alarming person had for an instant been almost genial.

. . . . . .

The blessed comfort of her kind of father!

He *was* waiting. Camilla flew into his arms. She kissed him and pressed her face against his with a tenderness meant for two. George Charlton understood. Tears stood in his eyes as he said: "So you've found somebody you love better than—any of us."

She accepted it. "Here he is."

Roy was beautiful to her father. They liked each other from the first. The comfort of that!

It struck her at once how much more easy he was with her father than with his own. More affectionate. Oh! they were going to be so happy all together.

"He"—Camilla's look set Roy upon the judgment seat—"he *quite* understands."

"Ah! that's always a good thing. But what particular branch—?"

"I've told him our plans: yours and mine."

"Oh! yours and mine." The lift and fall of his hand seemed to signal the plans farewell.

"He understands, father"—she said it again with her earnest look—"understands *perfectly* that we're going to live together."

"Yes, indeed," Roy agreed gaily.

"Well, well"—Mr. Charlton put on a look of humorous embarrassment—"and here have I been, ever since I got Camilla's telegram, saying to myself what a good thing it was that I'd just found out in the very nick of time where I liked to live. On board ship—"

"Oh, father! I don't see how we *can*"—in the exigency her eyes summoned Roy's—"how *are* we to live for ever on a ship?"

When her father joined in Roy's laughter she said to

herself how easy he was trying to make it—poor father! But as to deserting him, *nothing* should make her.

They discussed their more immediate plans. (Not a word about "plans" to *his* father!) Camilla's father agreed to everything except the idea of the wedding next week. He treated that as a joke—until he saw how determined Roy was. Then you saw that Mr. Charlton might be as firm in his unemphatic way as Mr. Trenholme with his steel-trap decision. It was the only occasion upon which he hinted at any sacrifice to him in giving up his last child.

He and Camilla must have a month or two together. "And you'll want some furbelows to be married in, won't you?"

And so, though he was so gentle about it, it was not James Trenholme but George Charlton who put on the brake.

"We'll see what Sister Julia can do," Camilla whispered over the banisters when she went up to bed that night.

. . . . . .

Roy seemed disposed to see what he could do without Sister Julia, in the way of demonstrating to Mr. Charlton that whether he would, or whether he wouldn't, consent to an immediate wedding, he had already lost his daughter. Unless Camilla's father made a hard and fast engagement to find her in for some meal, or to take her out at an appointed hour, Camilla was never to be found. She was gone to walk with Roy; or she was riding in the Park with him; or off to a matinée—or they had motored out to the country somewhere to look at horses. Camilla was only vaguely conscious of the Sambourne disapproval of these unchaperoned outings. The Sambournes were very dim to her in this dazzle in which she spent her days. They had said they were responsible for her till her father should come back. Well, he *was* back.

There seemed to be no end to the places Roy had to

show her, no end to the things to tell. And no bounds, apparently, to his amusement in watching the effect of all this upon Camilla; seeing her look of wonder at the strange shapes, colours, flavours of life, as Roy poured them out of his exhaustless cornucopia, like a vari-coloured stream of Christmas candies. If now and then she came upon the bitter brown of horehound or the sting of too potent mint, this was "experience" too—at which the astonished widening of Camilla's eyes was for Roy part of the fun of the whole thing.

"You never heard of that before?"

Ridiculous question! Camilla had never heard of anything.

Rare indeed in these days of sophistication to find such a pearl of ignorance. "If only they knew!" he once said to her in an extasis of delight over some *naïveté* of hers—"if only women *knew!*"—which sounded like so much else that she was hearing in these astonishing days, mere paradox, since precisely what he didn't advocate was that women should be allowed to know things, till he, or some other with a sense of humour, might have the fun of telling.

That same fun of telling led Roy into confidences, later to be regretted. At the moment they bore the fruit he hungered for.

Those shining "other ones" who sang divinely, who were travelled, accomplished, were *everything* that Camilla wasn't; how had it happened that none of them, but just a schoolgirl like Camilla Charlton was the Chosen? She wondered aloud that her head wasn't hopelessly turned. The reason it wasn't turned?

"This is Destiny. *We* didn't choose, we were both chosen," he said in one of his graver moments. And it was to be "for ever and for ever."

For ever.

How fond he had seemed to be of that word! How beautiful he made it sound.

After the daily turnings in the newspapers of the marital kaleidoscope, after following for these five years the public and private flounderings of certain of Miss Holroyd's "old girls" caught in the quicksands of divorce and desertion and deserting—the balm it was to hear Leroy say with that shining conviction "For ever!"

Naturally she saw more distinctly now, looking back, than she had been able at all to recognize at the time, how well Roy behaved under the stress of the liberty to which they helped themselves after Mr. Charlton's return.

The difficult part was going back to the others when the wonder-filled hours had flashed by at that mad motoring pace—the pace which seemed to be the special quality about all time spent in Roy's society.

"We *can't* go back and be engulfed in my relations, just yet!"

Camilla didn't see either how they could go back.

They had had a perfectly heavenly half-day at Vandewaters Landing. She had seen again how all those people there adored him, and how he, pretending not to consider them a tithe as much, for instance, as the Cousine Bette, was always looking out for the Callahans, the McAndrews and Englishes, little and big; helping, backing up, giving their friends and relations a start in life.

If anybody doubted the heaven-inspired goodness of Misther Rhoy, let 'em go to Mrs. Callahan. "Ye must just take 'm the roight way, m'dear," she'd tell Camilla aside. And she would illustrate the roight way by scenes out of Roy's earliest years.

Harder than ever after that to go back to the obscurely antagonistic atmosphere at the Sambournes.

"Why *should* we?" Roy said, slowing the car three blocks away.

"Why shouldn't we go to my home?"

"Your father's?"

"He isn't there. Gone west."

Camilla reflected. No, she thought not. He urged. No. Roy gloomed a little at that. He had turned the car into Madison Avenue.

"Why won't you come?"

She didn't answer.

"You don't trust me!" he denounced her with a downward glance. She was looking straight out at something new, strange, hardly distinguishable.

"No," he repeated, "you don't trust me."

"I don't trust myself," she said with her astonishing candour.

"Why, what are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

In the silence she looked at him with eyes that seemed to invite him to share in their perplexity.

He thought it over. "You don't mind doing something that most people would think far more—unconventional."

"You mean going with you to Vandewaters Landing?"

"Yes. Why is that?"

"Oh, I knew it would be all right to go there."

"Why?"

"Isn't it—" she hesitated; "isn't it because of your mother?"

"Humph!—more likely because of that old hag Joanna."

"*Dear* Joanna! I could listen to Joanna for ever."

. . . . . .

It was a good thing they went home. Camilla's father had come for her. He had been waiting over an hour. "Surely you have some idea where they are all this time," he said.

"Oh, yes," Mrs. Sambourne answered; "they've lunched at Vandewaters Landing."

"Who is there now?"

"At Vandewaters Landing? Nobody but servants," Mrs. Sambourne said.

"But isn't that a—a little steep?" inquired Mr. Charlton, faintly perturbed.

"Decidedly steep. You ought to stop it."

. . . . . .

He spoke to Camilla. "Yes," she said.

"You won't do that any more?"

"No. But a month *is* a long time."

"A month? Didn't we say two?"

"*We* said one."

George Charlton looked at her with unconcealed surprise. Then: "I dare say that's what Roy says to you, that even one month is a long time."

"It's what I say too," she answered, leaving him more astonished than ever.

His little Camilla!

It was, as she had foretold, the appearance of Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley which put a new face on the scene. For one thing Camilla was instantly transferred from the Sambournes' to the yet more spacious domicile in East 56th Street. Camilla dropped back readily into the younger sister attitude. Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley, brisk, affectionate, cordial, took the reins firmly in hand. Before ever she mounted the box, so far from taking out of Roy's wheel the spoke for which Mr. Charlton was responsible, Sister Julia put in a second. She plainly delighted in Roy, but she made no bones about interdicting his high-handed, Roy-al fashion of taking Camilla off for hours and hours, heaven knew where.

She insisted that they should behave like other people. To remind Roy more especially of their relationships to the world, she gave several parties. At the last—and meant to be most brilliant of these functions—Roy didn't appear. It was "very awful," according to Camilla, who suborned a maid to be off and on all evening at the telephone, trying to find out what had happened.

Nothing had happened. Roy had spent the evening at the club. "I'm sick of people. If I can't talk to Camilla, I don't want to talk at all."

Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley perceived that Roy could sulk. The episode induced reflectiveness in Mrs. Atherley.

"Are you coming out for an hour?" he demanded moodily of Camilla that next morning, "or are you angry, too, because I didn't come and hang round with a lot of stiffs nobody cares a picayune about."

"It isn't a nice way to talk about our party," and Camilla glanced anxiously at her sister.

"So you won't come!" He turned on his heel. Julia made a sign. Camilla read relenting in it, and sanction of an hour's motoring. Interpreted more intelligently, Mrs. Atherley's gesture really meant: Stop the gossip short by appearing with him in public without loss of time.

When they reached the Riverside Drive Roy had nearly recovered his good humour.

"Tell you what it is, Camilla, we've got to get away from these people." The automobile slowed. They rolled on in silence for a few seconds. "Say," he returned to her so quickly as to make her start. "Say, when we're married, we won't have one of 'em about. Not *one*—hey?"

She sacrificed her family and her friends with a smile.

"I *hate* people! When they stand between you and me I could chop them into mince-meat."

"Don't be so fierce, Roy."

"Yes, I will. I'll bite their heads off. I'll skin 'em alive if they don't let us alone. *Darling* . . ." for the next five minutes he sang a different strain. And then he asked what *she* had thought of his not coming the night before. Or had she thought of him at all? Satisfied on that point: "Well, I'll tell you what I did. I got Bill Henderson to come and box. Then I took a

plunge and had dinner an hour late. But I got to bed what time do you think? Ten o'clock. Went to sleep too. And Lord! maybe I didn't dream."

"Nice dreams?"

"Oh, very nice!—*I guess not.*" He made a face that struck Camilla as childish, funny and pitiful all in one. "When I waked up I'd have given anything if I'd gone to that darn party. I kept thinking, 'Camilla's angry, she don't love me any more.' And I could have howled. Not sure I *didn't* give just one little howl for a cent."

She surreptitiously pressed the hand that had slipped off the steering wheel down at her side.

It didn't say enough. "But loving me the least bit *last night*—oh, not you! Mad's a hornet—"

Such an idea stung her into speech. "One of the most beautiful things about you is . . ." she stuck there.

"All right. Beautiful's the cue. Go ahead!"

"What I mean—though you are so much older and know such a terrible lot, and to other people are so . . . yes, you *are* sometimes—"

"*What* am I? Perfect devil, darling?"

"You are often *very* . . . cavalier. But to me—"

"Yes—to you, what am I, beautifullest?"

"To me you are quite young and gentle, and almost like a little boy. Oh!" she turned her eyes up to his face, "I could never not love you when you are like a little boy."

"Oh, very well!" and together with delight they descended to those mild shallows where each new couple disport themselves with a fatuous sense of originality. Very well! Next time she scolded him he'd run away and put on paddlers. Sailor hat with blue ribbons. He held up first one hand and then another. "Tin pail. Wooden spade. 'Pease scoose me, Milla.'" He said every foolish thing he could think of. And he thought of a great many. They came home much revived.

. . . . . .

They were still more revived when they heard the upshot of a talk which Sister Julia had had with her father. If Julia had been the one who put the most effectual spoke in Leroy's wheel, it certainly was she who most handsomely removed the obstruction.

She did not retail the conversation beyond representing that she had said to Mr. Charlton, "Why, after all, *should* they wait? I'll attend to the wedding."

She and Leroy became tremendous friends in the course of an animated discussion as to details. She opposed with vigour and persuasiveness Roy's first idea of what she characterized as a bald and dowdy church affair. Camilla must have a home wedding.

There wasn't time, Roy said, for all that fuss.

The lady intimated, not too crudely, that with Plumstead-Atherley money flowing in a golden stream, the Plumstead-Atherleys' house could on short order be made to flower into conventional, or even super-conventional, bridal array.

Leroy denied the possibility—except at the cost of "days and days." No, the expeditious Church wedding for them—"Hey, Camilla?" But he hadn't reckoned with the amazing energy of Sister Julia.

She had already in those two hours not only won over Mr. Charlton—(by telephone, too! the wonderful woman) she had rung up an army of decorators, caterers, florists, dressmakers and cunning artificers of every sort. She had estimates already, and appointments for the next day, by the dozen.

Roy stayed to dinner.

"Come, dear," Julia said to the acquiescent Atherley as they rose from the table—"you come with me and read your *Evening Post* in my boudoir, while I write millions of letters!"

She left the two to themselves till near eleven o'clock.

"What, you still here, Roy!" she came in with an air of surprise. After he had said "good night," made very

charming by its touch of gratitude to Sister Julia, she called to him from the parlour threshold. "Oh, bless me, I'd forgotten! Head so full of Camilla's clothes and things—but there was a message for you, Roy. Telephoned on from the Sambournes. Somebody wanted you to meet her at the Cunard Dock. At seven. I'm dreadfully afraid she meant this evening. Somebody called Linda. I *am* sorry!"

"Oh, it's all right," he called back. "Doesn't matter."

Sister Julia began to talk about the wedding gown.

CHAPTER VIII

THE wedding gown, which had been her mother's —was tried on the same afternoon. And the great business was finished some little time before Mrs. Plumstead-Atherley could have hoped. "You'll have to wait a few minutes for Roy," she said as she set Camilla down at the Sambournes' door. Brisk, competent, and never more in her element, Sister Julia drove away to execute in the remaining two hours, commissions which most women could hardly have crowded into as many days.

Aunt Rosamond had telephoned Roy during luncheon, asking him to look in about four. She added that a package had come for Camilla marked, "Fragile. With care," and Roy could take it back with him.

He grumbled privately at having "to go and gas with Aunt Rosamond."

"You don't seem to love your Aunt Rosamond as you should," remarked Mrs. Atherley.

"I don't know about 'should.' But I *don't* exactly love her."

"I wonder why," said Camilla.

He confessed he never could quite make out. "But I don't," he repeated, and then thrust Aunt Rosamond aside with a plan for Camilla's coming to meet him.

. . . . . .

As she stepped out of her sister's car, a tall figure in a sealskin coat that fell to her heels went up the Sambourne steps, and rang the bell. The door opened so quickly you might have thought the lady was being waited for. And so she must have been, for she asked for nobody.

The servant took her straight to the library. At the

door the lady turned and looked at Camilla. Heaven! what a scalpel scrutiny. The library door opened and shut.

"It's Linda," Camilla said to herself.

. . . . . .

She bent over the package, that lay on the hall table, addressed to her in Miss Holroyd's hand. Camilla had written to the Principal to say she wasn't going back, and this—it must be a wedding gift.

Linda!

The maid came again to open the door, and this time it was Roy. Roy—with the happy light in his face when he saw her waiting there.

"Mrs. Sambourne says will you come to the library?" The servant led the way.

"Shan't be long," he said as he passed.

"Roy!" she whispered—so low he didn't bear. Why didn't she run forward, and catch hold of him? Why wasn't she saying out loud: "I'm afraid she's got Linda in there." But then, suppose she *hadn't* got Linda in there! And why should it matter if she had . . .? She let him go.

Linda.

Camilla went into the parlour and sat down. She broke the seals on the "Fragile" parcel and looked inside. A vase of Tiffany glass. Linda—

Mrs. Sambourne came out of the library, and went slowly upstairs. Miss Mary came and looked in with an absorbed face, and went away. You couldn't say whether she had seen Camilla or not.

There was an air about the place that reminded Camilla of something she had known before. What was it? Yes, it felt like that day of terrible suspense when her mother had had the operation. People went about just like this—hurrying silently up and down stairs, putting absorbed faces into the room and swiftly out again. Was Leroy under the knife? Why should he be? Had Linda

come to tell him, as she *had* told so many others, that he belonged to her?

Was Tina upstairs? Camilla's fever to go up and watch for Roy over the banisters was cooled at the thought of having to pass the library door. If it were to open suddenly what should she see? She walked across the room, and stood in the failing winter light half concealed behind the great bronze group in the alcove.

And then something happened like a dream. The library door opened, and Leroy came out. He never looked to right or left. Just snatched up his hat and went striding out—

As if he had forgotten everybody, everything, but what had been happening in the library. What *had* been happening in there? Camilla stood a moment in stark astonishment. Would he be coming back for her? She couldn't risk it. "I must run after him," she said to herself.

Before she reached the hall the door of the library opened again. And that tall shape stood there. The light had been turned on in the library. Out of the half shadow in which Camilla stood she stared at the figure framed in the doorway. And the figure stared at her. The sealskin coat no longer hid the noble outlines. The figure queened it there.

"Why . . . Camilla! Is that you . . .? My *dear* child . . .!" Mrs. Sambourne's voice had a flustered sound seldom heard in its pleasant modulations. She came hurrying down the stair as she spoke.

Deliberately the figure on the library threshold waited there: "And is this Miss Charlton?" Under the betrayal of speech, that touch of Tragedy which had dignified the statuesque presence vanished with startling completeness. Perhaps only by contrast with Mrs. Sambourne's voice, did this new one sounding in Camilla's ears for the first time, bring associations only of the

trivial and the commonplace. It reassured the girl in some queer fashion. As though she had said to herself, "Not with that tone does Calamity speak."

"Miss Ballard"—Mrs. Sambourne had performed the introduction hurriedly. Though suddenly appearing in so different a light, the impression made by Linda Ballard was nevertheless striking enough. The little boat-shaped black velvet hat with a trailing black feather brought out the red in the chestnut-coloured hair. Under the surface excitement in the face, you saw that the impudently pretty features had settled long before the disillusion of today into a mould of discontent.

Linda's sharp eyes—so bright that unless you looked very close you couldn't have told she'd been crying—had taken their inventory of Camilla, and seemed to wish publicly to proclaim the low value they set upon what they saw. Miss Ballard had the air of casting Camilla on one side, as she passed her to put an arm round Mrs. Sambourne.

"Hello!" she called cheerfully up the stair. Tina had appeared, turning on the hall lights as she descended. "I've thought of a joint present for you and Bob. When is the happy day?" She embraced Tina. The three stood talking. Left out as Camilla was, she felt it as difficult to go and say good-bye, as to betray her state of mind by hurrying after Leroy without preliminary. Besides, where had he gone? Not, she felt with a sinking—not to Sister Julia's with *that* look on his face. She started slightly as Linda burst out laughing.

"Don't you call that rich?" She interrupted herself "I must get my coat." The others waited where she left them. They followed her with their eyes.

Camilla too. It struck her that people would always do this. Linda was one of those people who have the faculty of investing their commonest act with an indefinable interest. A more perfect figure the gods had never fashioned. The beauty of her movement!—you watched

fascinated, longing to say, *Do it again!* And all she'd done was to cross the hall into the library.

She came back folding the richly lined garment round her with an effect of hugging its luxury.

"Tell Roy"—she smiled at the company out of the high upturned collar—"tell him I'll do my best to keep my promise"—she got all she wanted, apparently, out of her smiling pause—"my promise to come to the wedding. You see, I'm getting married myself, and it *does* take up all one's spare moments. Don't you find that, Miss Charlton?"

Camilla stood dumb. The others, too, for an instant. Then: "Who are you marrying?" Tina demanded. "Your Englishman?"

"*Not* my Englishman. My American. . . ." She stooped to the lower fastenings in the long coat, and turned up a laughing face. "Everybody's getting married all in a heap. Sort of epidemic, as I told Luther Carey."

"Oh, have you been seeing him? I thought Captain Carey had been sent down to Panama," Tina said.

"And so he was."

Mrs. Sambourne filled in the next pause by remarking that she'd heard Captain Carey was being a great success.

"So he is!" She sang Luther's praises. She quoted high Government approval. "They're just crazy about Luther."

"Then what's he come back for?" demanded Tina.

"Why, for me." Linda drew on her long pearl-coloured suede glove with a meticulous grace.

"Oh, for you! . . ." Tina gaped.

"Yes. Hadn't you heard? We've caught the fever too."

"You don't mean—?"

"I'm afraid I do. We're going to be married right away."

The stupefaction of the company was too complete to be disguised. She looked round.

"I hope nobody's counting on forbidding the banns . . . 'cause we aren't going to have any banns. Lu says they take too much time."

No, she wouldn't have a taxi—she must reduce her figure, or Lu would scold her. "I'm frightened to death of Lu. He's got me like that!" She flattened her gray suede thumb on the hall table.

"Well," said Tina, as she opened the door for the visitor, "I hope you'll ask us to the wedding."

"Sure! if Lu doesn't hustle me out of my rights."

"Rights?"

"Yes, to a proper leisurely sort of wedding. Like Miss Charlton's. Good-bye!" and she was gone.

They were all still standing staring at one another when Harrington came in.

"Did you meet Linda?"

"Linda?"

"Well, she's going to marry Captain Luther Carey."

Harrington joined the staring game. But he recovered himself. "Going to marry Carey, is she? Well, all I can say is Carey hasn't heard of it." He'd seen Captain Carey on that gentleman's arrival, bag and baggage, at the club not an hour and a half ago. "Come on in," Carey had said, "I've wanted to have a talk." It was all about "the tough job down yonder" and its immense fascination. He'd been sent up by the Chief to submit a plan at Washington. Carey was full of projects of his own for circumventing the slipperiness of the Devil Culebra. "Thinks about nothing else night or day. No more idea of marrying than I have."

"One of Linda's lies," they agreed.

"Said that just to save her face."

Poor Linda!

When Mr. Sambourne was told he gave his chuckling

laugh. "Good for Linda! Commendable presence of mind. Lots of stuff in Linda!"

Roy, too.

When Hal told him, he was reported to have said with an accent of admiration: "Linda's game!"

"Where did you vanish to?" he demanded of Camilla. He reproached her for being too impatient to wait for him.

. . . . . .

Two days later, on the morning before Camilla's wedding, the papers announced the marriage of the well-known society beauty, Miss Belinda Ballard, to Captain Luther Carey of the Engineers, who, etc., etc. Linda's own phrases were recognized in the terms used to convey official approval of Captain Carey. Miss Ballard, the *Times* account said, had only been back in America a few days, having been summoned from Europe the moment Captain Carey was entrusted with his mission to Washington. "The wedding was of the simplest, as Captain Carey is obliged to return at once to the scene of his labours." And then that masterpiece of Linda's, the final climax of the finish: "The marriage was the natural culmination of a boy and girl romance."

CHAPTER IX

SISTER JULIA, with her generous James at her back, had executed marvels of speed and splendour.

The house in 56th Street was turned into a temple of roses. Under a Marechal Neil marriage bell near the end of the music room, Camilla, in her mother's wedding-gown, was married, to strains of the most expensive music, in the midst of a bewildering crush of Julia's acquaintances and members of the Trenholme-Sambourne circle. All people utterly strange to Camilla, except certain of the schoolgirls and the teachers, from Miss Holroyd down. They were there somewhere, lost in the crowd. Besides Leroy, Camilla was conscious of only one other in all that throng—her father. She looked at his shadowed face with the knowledge that he was seeing clearest the one who wasn't there. Yes, dear, Camilla's look was meant to say, I am remembering her, too.

Everybody appeared to know Leroy, and that fact made the featureless horde seem, if not friends, at all events friendly. Not that it mattered. Nothing mattered. Except Leroy and getting through with all this, and going away to Boston.

. . . . . .

Why Boston? Camilla, looking back, asked herself again. She found no answer beyond the vague recollection of hearing about the size and splendour, and expensiveness of a certain newly opened "Fen Palace Hotel." At the time she had no more asked "Why Boston?" than she had asked why—with that beautiful country seat on the Hudson, and the empty houses of

friends scattered about on mountains and beside lakes—she and Leroy should spend the Great Days in a hotel of any sort.

It was all right, because Roy arranged it. They had the Bridal Suite, and a special corps of servants to serve them in their own rooms. The newspapers told at columns' length the details of the wedding, and reported from day to day: "Mr. and Mrs. Leroy Trenholme lunched in their own apartments, and drove for an hour on the Speed Way"; or "dined in their own apartments and, from their box at the Boston Opera, heard one act of *Carmen*"; or, motored out to the racing stables at Didsbury and "returned in time to dine in their own apartments." If this recurrent phrase expressed on the part of the public some sense of loss of their rightful share in the happiness of these young people, any such conception of being defrauded of their rights was due to the Trenholmes' place in the social and financial scheme of things.

"In their own apartments" became a by-word with the pair. It expressed their entire and glorious sufficiency unto themselves. It expressed Roy's active detestation of the rest of the world.

Some cousins of Camilla's left cards. "Oh, yes! mother used to tell us about the Bonds. When shall we go and see them?"

"Well"—he seemed to lay careful plans—"if you ask *me*, I should say—never."

"Then I'll write and invite them to come and see us."

"Not on your life!"

"Yes, to dine with us 'in our apartments.' The newspapers will be *so* obliged to us."

"*I* wouldn't."

She had a scene with Roy about those cousins. She couldn't think he was serious in opposing her little plan. But he hated cousins. Specially the Boston brand.

Then she'd go alone and see them.

He wouldn't think of letting her go to see any cousins on earth.

Yes, she would. She was tired of the hotel. The newspapers were right. They *were* always in their apartments. She *loved* cousins—

He locked the door and put the key in his pocket.

"Tired," was she? Tired of married life after three days!

They were so happy, they indulged in these little pretences of difference, out of sheer plenitude of rapturous content with each other.

They didn't go out at all that afternoon.

Camilla nearly fell asleep over dinner. She was the sleepiest creature Roy had ever encountered. He upbraided her.

It *wasn't* just now, all of a sudden. She'd always been a Sleepy Head. Father would tell Roy that. And didn't Roy know there were people who needed a great deal more sleep than others? *She* was that sort. "Sleep is the most necessary thing in the world," she told him gravely. Hadn't he heard of the scientific experiment? They tried it with dogs. They found that a dog can live three weeks without food. If he's kept awake, he dies in five days. Her acute sympathy with that dog prompted inextinguishable laughter in her husband.

. . . . . .

They had a more serious difference before the week was out. Camilla was troubled, offended, and she had shown it. She had not come into her new estate all-ignorant. Jessica, and country life, and the instruction imparted by a healthy body had seen to that. But she had no more prevision than most young people of the danger to equilibrium in that collision called marriage, between two persons of widely different experience. Their case was only an intensification of the danger incurred in common by the ordinary well-brought-up girl and the ordinary young townsman of means. The heart

of that danger lies in the fact that the two are not making their discoveries together.

When two normal people go hand in hand into the chamber of mysteries, when "the mystery" waits on both, nature may be trusted to take care of her children. Too often the too experienced one of the twain hands on to the one too little prepared, a knowledge and a practice too great in sum to be assimilated without risk of disorder.

This is the cause of many a secret shock which assumes different disguises before the world. If the shock has not resulted in timely recoil, and at need in interrupted relationship, it will bear the bitter fruit of hysteria and ill-health in one sort of nature, and in another a coarsening of imagination, an adaptability and an appetite, which may stagger the initiator.

That more evil has not reached the race by this road is due to perhaps the greatest of all Nature's miracles: the power of transmutation in the passion of love, the power of youthful fire in a healthy soul to burn away impurities —and to gather up and treasure the fine gold of intenser feeling.

Camilla was moving among amazements and mysteries beyond all thinking. That it was Leroy who led her, made all safe, made all right, made all a closer knitting of their lives.

These things, not the words spoken at the wedding, these yieldings and mergings, and incredible ecstasies, made the miracle of marriage. The two who had these memories between them, were set for ever apart from the rest of the world. Memory, the High Priest, had made them for ever and for ever one. Apart, they stood naked and ashamed. Together, they were mutually screened, supported, justified.

For the first time he had gone to sleep without kissing her "the last thing." She wouldn't believe he could go to sleep like that. She had lain there waiting till his un-

reasonableness should pass. She would hear his voice in a moment: "I'm sorry!"—and then the last sleepy kiss, final benediction of the day.

But instead of that, "cold shoulder," and the regularly taken breath of sleep. It was incredible. He was pretending. She waited while the minutes passed. No, it was real.

The wind blew the blind out. That would wake him. No, not yet. The next time it flapped he would start up, and maybe swear a little, and half jerk the blind off the roller in his wrath. She waited, eager for this episode. The blind blew out again and again. No other sound or motion in the room.

Bad enough that he should turn a cold shoulder on her as brief penance—without shutting her out behind a barrier of sleep. She would tell him when he waked that she understood better now his objection to her premature sleepiness. It *was* gloomifying to be the only one awake.

Never in all the nights since she was born had she, the Sleepy Head, been so wide-eyed, so acutely conscious. All that she knew of life seemed to go in procession through her head, till it ached and drummed like a wooden bridge that echoes to the tread of marching feet, to the rumble of wheels, to the thud of hoofs.

"Roy!" she whispered.

No faltering in the even breath.

That earlier sense of bewildered unhappiness had long given way to sheer blank loneliness. She had never before been conscious when he was unconscious. It was like desertion.

Heaven be thanked! now he was waking up. No. After that slight movement, his head slipped further down, and he was breathing on a new, more audible note. He made a slight arrested movement of his shoulder and spoke into the pillow. "No," he said, and again, "No, *no!*" A struggle, a strange shackled struggle, and an incoherent anguish of protest: "No! no!"

She leaned over him. "Roy!"

"H'm—h'm"—he made low moaning. But worse than the misery of the sound, those little defeated motions. She tried to speak louder. Her voice stuck in her throat. Again that dreadful stifled moaning.

"Roy!" she whispered brokenly. How unhappy she must have made him!—for him to cry like that in his sleep. She leaned over him, and she it was who said: "I'm sorry. Forgive me, forgive—"

But he wasn't comforted. He fetched a deeper groan. At the end of that, a cry. Lord in Heaven, what a cry! Camilla clutched him by the shoulder: "Leroy! Leroy!"

He opened heavy eyes. "What—?" As she fell weeping against him, "Don't make a row—those people—next—might hear." She clung to him, stifling her sobs on his shoulder. He soothed her drowsily. "What for—? It's all right. All . . . ri . . ." He slept again.

Camilla lay there, and cried silently a long time.

She wondered afresh at the amazingness of life. And whether it was so only for her. She was quite sure, after reflection, that her life was without parallel. People couldn't go about with those composed and commonplace looks if life had ever seized them and blown them like pine straw over the barrens.

She reasoned with herself. Admonished herself. As for Leroy, how could you compare anybody with Leroy? He was different from all the world.

And she loved him.

Love made everything all right.

. . . . . .

In the morning: "Dear, I'll never be bad to you again and make you cry in your sleep."

He laughed. He ought to have told her, he said. It wasn't her doing. "I get the horrors like that some-

times. And you must *always* wake me. You were too long about it last night."

He'd had these attacks from childhood, Joanna would tell her. They were worse after that touch of fever down in Cuba. Or maybe the shock of the wound—or something. He'd got so now—he didn't mind telling her—he didn't like to sleep alone. When he was alone, even after he'd struggled awake, he couldn't shake off the—whatever it was. A perfectly irrational horror. He hadn't an idea of what. But he'd lie in the grip of it and shiver and sweat. She must always wake him.

Oh, she would! She'd always be there to guard him against that.

There was pride, a sense of responsibility, in the new tenderness she felt for him. Oh, yes! she loved him more for his vague trouble's sake.

Ranging this revelation beside others that he made, carelessly enough, in the glorious security of those early days, Camilla found a reason to account for some of the things Roy told her.

She made that midnight fear of his bear the burden of certain past mistakes. He *couldn't* be alone, poor Roy!

This absorbing pursuit of coming to know one another, went on longer for him and Camilla than for most, largely because of her inexpressiveness. She would have given him everything with both hands, if she'd known how.

As it was, her lover found in this very failing of hers a value that piqued and held him.

"Words!" he flung out, what were they but chains? They set bounds to the limitless. They pretended to plumb the unfathomable. He celebrated "the eloquence of softly shut lips," and the next moment, characteristically, he set traps for speech.

Just as he had adventured in other domains, so here further and always further yet, he explored that inex-

perience in his wife, with a sense of high entertainment in what some one has called "the ingenuousness of intellect in its early contact with reality."

Leroy had bought a house in East 59th Street. While it was being done over, they went to his stud farm near Lexington in Kentucky. And after that, to Vandewaters Landing for a month. Roy's father was there and quite kind. The kindness of a person who, against his better judgment, is constrained to pay some notice to a strange unclassified wild pet in a cage—looks and watches, until he comes to feel something dangerously approaching affection for the creature. But always—on the verge of being too confident, too fond—seeming to remind himself: I don't really know a thing about this animal!

"Say, Camilla"—Roy began one day, looking more serious than he often was except when perpetrating some joke—"I don't think you're at all nice to my father."

Heavens! what had she done?

"No wonder you look conscience-stricken, treating him like that."

"*How*, Roy?"

"Why, calling him 'Mr. Trenholme,' as if he'd just been introduced. Or rather as if you hated him. Perhaps you do hate him. No? Very well, then—"

Leroy was endlessly diverted by Camilla's difficulty in bringing out that word father. He was even more enchanted by his parent's reception of Camilla's pious effort. Meat and drink to Leroy was James Trenholme's palpable annoyance at being addressed in this manner by a young woman. A sharp look of suspicion cast her way —a what-do-you-want-*now* sort of expression, desperately disconcerting to his daughter-in-law. The worst of it was that, once begun, Camilla felt it impossible to leave off this "fathering." But she performed the rite with an anxious air, productive of much pleasure to her husband if not to the gentleman most concerned.

For any shortcoming on the part of Camilla's father-in-law, Joanna Callahan seemed generously disposed to atone. Roy complained that Camilla was always going off to Joanna's domain.

"Well, if you're good she'll let you come too."

"Good, is ut!" Joanna laughed at the far-fetched notion. The trouble with Mister Roy was that never since he was so high had he wanted anything he hadn't got. "An' the notions of him! Wouldn't eat this; and he must have tin helpin's o' that, or he'd howl himself into a conniption fit. He'd ate and ate till he'd hate the soight of ut! Mind ye don't give him his own way, me dear." Then, with a confidential air and a hand on Camilla's arm: "There was only wan thing he liked bether than *gettin'* the grand new toys, an' that was batherin' 'em to bits. Thin he must have new wans. But it's the darlin' he is intoirely—"

Camilla loved Vandewaters Landing, but she longed for the moment when she and Leroy could go and live in the beautiful New York house. "Not yet. We'd be overrun. Are you tired of my society?" he demanded. He declined invitations for them to go to Newport and Bar Harbour, and took Camilla off to a little place that nobody else knew about, up in Maine, where there was canoeing. After being gloriously happy there for three weeks, all in a minute—he took to hating the place.

New York!

The next evening saw him installed. The following day, with equal determination and dispatch, Roy set his shoulder to the business wheel. This was for Camilla a new Leroy—so new as to give her a feeling of shyness towards him, of having to learn him all over again. A Leroy grave, earnest, punctual as the clock, true son of his father.

He would come out of these submersions in business with renewed zest for pleasure, for theatre parties and Country Club life. Camilla saw him on these occasions

surrounded by other women, flattered, and flirted with, the soul and centre of the gayest group. His ready response to all this, especially the flirtatiousness, which was like second nature to him, troubled Camilla sorely. He teased her for being jealous, and that so hurt the ideal she had made in her mind, that she coerced herself to take these matters differently. Two discoveries she secretly pledged herself never after this to lose sight of.

(1) That in spite of his hating her to have people about, Leroy was really a very social being, just as she very definitely wasn't.

(2) In spite of the tendency to depression which she was beginning to find in him (or should she say because of it?), jokes and fun, that perplexed when they didn't fatigue her, were the breath of life to Leroy.

So then, out of his greater love of his kind, and his sense of humour, she elaborated the theory that was first put to the test at that dinner party where he flirted so desperately with Pansy Dillon. Pansy was a nice girl, rather daring, and distractingly pretty. Some said she was engaged for the third time. After a whole evening of nonsense between her and Leroy, he pretended it was impossible, mentally, morally and physically impossible, for him to part from her. As they all stood at the door saying good-night, Leroy and Pansy each outdid the other in a comedy of lamentation.

"And they pretend parting is such sweet sorrow. Let us see, Pansy. Since we have the bitter, who'd grudge us the sweet?" He kissed her. "Yes," he announced, "it is sweet."

Camilla stood there. She wasn't smiling. She wasn't frowning. She was just bearing it.

"What do you say to that, Mrs. Trenholme?"

"He's got such an affectionate disposition," she explained.

This was an immense hit. Though they stormed the

skies with laughter at her diagnosis, it was true. He said so himself on the way home. He loved her for understanding that when he was happy he *did* feel affectionate towards people.

However plainly he was refreshed by these occasional dips into the old warm flood of social relaxation, he hadn't yet arrived at the point where he was willing to slacken in the least the rein on Camilla's neck.

He hated to come home and find what he called odds and ends of people about the house. "Why do you ask that monkey-faced Swazey girl here—with her malicious eyes?" "What did Harrington *want?*"

"Why, nothing in particular."

"Then let him go somewhere else for it."

Often Roy wouldn't come into the room if sister Julia was there. "No, I don't dislike her—certainly not." But when he heard her voice, he'd go off to the club. You could see that he "felt it" when he found Camilla occupied, even with her father—or chiefly he minded that. "When I come home I want you to myself."

In the end he had his way.

She had sworn she wouldn't desert her father. Practically she had. She realized that the time she broke a certain engagement. Leroy came in just as she was going down town to call for her father at his office. Leroy displeased . . . he had come home early on purpose. She ought to have "asked" him, or told him, anyway, if she was "going off like this." He had on his "small-child" face—he needed her. So she telephoned a message to Mr. Charlton's office that she was "prevented." She was a good deal torn by the divided duty at the moment. Still more when, later, she remembered it was one of the Holy Days in her father's and mother's calendar. He must have gone alone to take the memorial lilies to Long Island.

"How do you spend your time?" he asked her once. "Waiting for Leroy," she answered.

It was not an occupation calculated to make her forget her disappointment at not having a child.

Suppose she were never to have a child.

. . . . . .

For a time she couldn't face that—even as the barest supposition. That such a fate could be hers, she would still have sworn, a year later, wasn't thinkable, when, in truth, love had carried her protestant, aching, well past the first of those Stations of the Cross of Womanhood. The proof of this came through Leroy. Out of one of his restless, aimless moods was born to her the secret thought: oh, if he had only *had* a son!

Perhaps—perhaps he had!

And was ashamed to say so. Thought maybe that she would behave about it as the ladies did in books. That she, like they, had been able to force herself to accept the knowledge of all those interests that lay in the past—and then be ready to die a thousand deaths on discovery of some neglected child.

The phrase, neglected child, stirred her. She saw a little boy born after "the Isabelle episode" ended, and before that Easter morning two years ago. The little boy would be three or four. She saw him—a tiny, curly-headed Roy. Her heart swelled. Neglected. Perhaps worse. Ill-treated, maybe.

She would go to her husband the very next time he was in one of his moods and put her arms round him and say . . . oh! she would find the words for *that*. But she must be very careful and wait for the auspicious hour.

. . . . . .

"Do you know what today is, Roy?" He made various bad shots. "Today we've been married two years." He was sorry he'd forgotten. He would come home early, and they'd go motoring and dine in the country.

When he came he brought her an old-time pouncet-box of gold, delicately engraved and encrusted with tiny diamonds.

"I don't know why I chose that,"—he seemed to apologize.

But she knew why. "Because it's beautiful. And looks as if it had been loved. I shall love it, too."

"But you can't use it for anything, I'm afraid."

Yes, she could. She had been needing just such a treasure box.

That second anniversary stood out in her memory for another reason. Leroy had been in one of those adorable moods of his when the infection of his loving gaiety made the whole world one shimmer of iridescent delight. He hadn't minded her not wanting to go to the Long Island Country Club. They went exploring. Their reward was to discover a new haunt—and that is a chapter by itself. But you couldn't talk about, couldn't think about anything sad.

Driving home late, he told her stories.

At some of the best, only silence out of Camilla.

He had more than once said that if he had a fault to find with her, it was that she couldn't be depended on to laugh at his jokes. They were not always in the most impeccable taste—his jokes—but—bless you!—*that* wasn't why she didn't laugh. She didn't see the point. Now and then, when she did see it, the point would prick instead of tickling her. This made her an uncertain companion.

There were many things he'd have been quite willing to share with her, only . . . Well, it was her fault that he didn't.

She'd stare so—and look away with something in her eyes that didn't add to the gaiety of the occasion. He could have named the very day when he ceased to think adorable that sensitive ignorance of hers. The day when the yoke of it pressed for the first time on his neck. In an interval of silence, filled on his part by an embarrassed resentment, he stood turning over one of Camilla's volumes of poetry. One phrase struck him as "made for

Camilla." He drew his pencil underneath the words:

"Thy formidable innocence—"

He had begun by thinking her wonderful in every way. People, according to him, hadn't understood Camilla. Or they had libelled her. Her own father hadn't an idea—! Treated her like a child.

She's not a child. She's a glorious woman. She's a goddess!

Then little by little . . . yes, she *is* a child. An adorable child. Simplicity, in a guise so gracious, still had its charm.

"Innocence" was not yet "formidable."

As they motored home that night after a remarkably good dinner—and more than one cocktail—("they knew how" at this place) Leroy, out of high spirits, natural and acquired, was moved "to tell her things," not paying much attention to his companion's increasing gravity.

"Was that Isabelle?" she asked, trying to keep track. "Oh, Charlotte, then! What! *Another* . . . ?" Her face of bewilderment at the lengthening list! Then, so little in the way she had planned: "And did you never have a child—at all?"

Leroy's inextinguishable laughter, at the implication: all this cry and no wool!

"Oh, if you'd oftener say things like that!"

But had he known, the young wife's thoughts went deeper. Or, maybe, one should say her instinct. Not my fault!

Looking back she gave him credit for doing what he could to work off his superfluous energies. This may not have been the end in view when he played polo—but she remembered in this connection a man she couldn't bear, who used to come and box for an hour with Leroy. Whatever the press at the office, there was time for hunting if the weather served.

She came to know that he mustn't be expected to sit still and read in a garden, or talk by the fire. He must for ever be "doing something." For choice, something "different." She might have invented some means of keeping pace with his passion for action, had she any previous experience of men of superabundant energies, or of that intensification of restlessness bred by never sticking to anything—except business. The exception seemed, in Leroy's case, to whet the hunger for change, once he had turned his back upon the office and its triumphant monotony of success. Since the "excitement habit" was driven on the curb down there, he must find compensation up town.

He found it—one way or another. Or if he didn't, then a Leroy whom the great majority of his acquaintances would have failed to recognize. Not merely out of sorts; sardonic, bitter-tongued. At such times Camilla would feel that his more usual air of belonging to the careless, light-hearted brotherhood, was the veriest blind. What was real was his cynicism. And so very surprisingly, was his melancholy.

In the very midst of happiness, and *because* of happiness, he would fall to an indictment of duller days. "This won't last." "If you oftener did that." But life wasn't made so, according to Leroy. "Life's like a horrible kind of provender they call in England plum duff. A waste of sticky dough—here and there a currant. That's life."

"You are tired."

"You've hit it. Look here, Milla, let's cut the painter, and go abroad. To the land of Plum Duff. I want a thoroughbred—"

"Is it the land of thoroughbreds too?"

. . . . . .

The project was modified through a great desire on the part of certain members of the American colony in Paris to have Leroy come there.

The Trenholmes spent most of the time in France. In England, too, Leroy had acquaintances—but the travellers saw, there, chiefly the outsides of things. They seemed to Camilla to be always going to the races. You wouldn't believe such a little country could have so many races, if you hadn't been in England with Leroy.

Camilla was secretly delighted when Goodwood seemed for the moment to put a period to this extraordinary pre-occupation with the turf. Cowes week she liked—but the time in Scotland best of all.

The day Camilla was expecting to be taken on to Oban, Leroy burst out after breakfast: "Lord! I shall be glad to get back to work. What we ever came abroad for, *I* don't know."

It certainly hadn't been to please Camilla. "I thought you've enjoyed some of these things," she said.

For answer Leroy got up and stood by the hotel breakfast-table, against the rules lighting a cigar. "There's no place," he said, "where they know how to live but America."

Telegrams flew back and forth all that day, between Leroy and his Uncle Granger, who was known to be passing through London on the way home.

Providentially some friends of the Sambournes were trying to get rid of their tickets, "best cabins on the ship."

"It's a direct answer to prayer," said Leroy.

CHAPTER X

THAT last crossing!

It was vivider far than this. For all happening on the present voyage seemed to be the sort Maeterlinck tells of which goes on in the soul. But the last time she had passed this way Leroy was with her, Leroy pervading the ship—

Mr. and Mrs. Sambourne were of the party, and their boy Jim, very proud of his new friend, Mr. Ogden Marriott. In addition were several hundred other passengers, of whom a small but conspicuous fraction belonged to the New York Four Hundred, of foolish renown. The *Andalusia* was a favourite ship, and fashionable America was returning home in force.

The remembered figures buzzed about Leroy in the remembered way, just as, amongst those who were unknown, many a pair of eyes turned to follow him.

But no one who could conceivably be Jim's (and all America's)—Man of Letters, and Minister Plenipotentiary, for long now, to the same little Scandinavian Court. Camilla's curiosity to verify Mr. Ogden Marriott did not prevent her from subconsciously registering the fact that, amongst those swarming on the decks and crowding the companion-ways, was a fair proportion of pretty faces.

Three and a half years had brought her to a point of experience which enabled her quite clearly to forecast who, in a given company of strangers, would be Leroy's intimates before long.

There was one of the predestined in the opposite suite.

"I wonder who she is?" Camilla arrested Leroy a

moment before the crowd should swallow him. "Let us get a list."

"The Honourable Mrs. Hurst. Husband's a Secretary at the Embassy in Washington."

"Oh, you know her?"

"Not guilty." He pulled the list out of his pocket and handed it to his wife.

Camilla found herself smiling. Of course he'd be the first passenger to acquire a list. He hadn't been ten minutes on board before, strolling about with that indifferent air, talking to this one and that, he had appropriated with unerring judgment the most sheltered places for the Trenholme-Sambourne chairs; had grappled to him the soul of the chief deck steward, and, by some means unknown, secured for his party the best *table apart* in the dining saloon, although the seating was not officially dealt with till the ship had put to sea.

By exception, this time, Camilla made acquaintance with their handsome neighbour before Roy did—over a question of Mrs. Hurst's bag, which had been put in the Trenholmes' suite.

Mrs. Reginald Hurst was a long-waisted, self-possessed person with humorous greenish eyes and a very pure white complexion, a lady whose good looks (as Camilla observed that first night) took on a fictitious youth along with a dazzling sumptuousness, when set off by evening dress, and seen in the glare of electricity. One of those women you meet oftenest in England, who light up so well that they give the simplest dinner the air of being a banquet.

At breakfast you saw, with surprise, white threads here and there in the lady's sand-brown hair. She hadn't waited for morning to reveal the fact that she had, not only a husband, but four children awaiting her in Washington. She had been detained by having contracted a peculiarly foolish disease.

"Don't you think it an affectation of juvenility in a

person of my years to have measles?" Anyhow the children had to be kept out of the way. They had preceded her—in care of her sister-in-law and the governess. "So I haven't worried."

You would say Mrs. Reginald Hurst never worried. She sat that first night at the table next to the Trenholmes, and she and Leroy had laughed and talked "across."

Camilla's attention was frankly absorbed by Mr. Ogden Marriott. He turned out singularly unlike the mental picture she had made of him. As she had read his On-Looker Series while still at school, she imagined him to be very old by now. Behold him, a long-limbed and sparely built person with black hair, iron-greyed at the temples, iron-grey moustache, eyes kind but tired, speculating without enthusiasm through large black-rimmed glasses. Camilla strained her ears to hear above the subdued clatter of dishes and the seven hundred anything but subdued voices, something which the "Looker-On" was saying about "our increase in luxury." He was talking to Mrs. Sambourne about "the old voyages," the first taken with his mother—"when I was your age," he said to Jim—voyages embalmed, as Camilla knew, in those volumes of *Impressions* which recorded with a haunting felicity the impact of foreign life and letters upon the Transatlantic mind.

"Nothing brings the change home like this." The black-rimmed glasses caught the softened shine from hundreds of pink-silk-shaded lights, on scores of tables richly decked with hothouse fruit and flowers. The recording eyes passed from groups of men and women in evening dress to the army of liveried servants, moving lightly about with vast trays or with single gold-necked bottles packed in silver ice-coolers.

Yes, he was only coming home for a few months' leave. The tone in which he answered Mr. Sambourne's question was something weary. What sort of home, Camilla

wondered. She knew that his wife had been dead for years. An unmarried daughter presided over his foreign establishment. Jim had reported her as "nothing particular to look at, and rather old—twenty-seven or eight." Why wasn't she with him? A father like that!

Like what, precisely?

Camilla speculated.

Leroy consulted Mr. Marriott about the order. A helpless, harassed look came into the clever face. He turned to Mrs. Sambourne. "Oh! whatever you have."

"Does it depress you, too," she returned, with her sympathetic smile, "to have to decide what to eat?" Mrs. Sambourne was agreeing with every odd view of the distinguished man. "We always," she said, "make my nephew do the ordering. We have a theory he likes it."

"You may be sure he wouldn't, if he didn't like it!" Mr. Sambourne threw in.

Marriott thought this impossible. "It must be philanthropy." While Leroy was instructing the obsequious steward: "I admire the man," Marriott protested, "who doesn't lose his head over such an array. Look at it!" He stretched out his hand, palm upward, over the menu lying by his plate. His finger nails tapped this item, and that, on the interminable list—"delicacies from every quarter of the globe!" He sat back, and over Mrs. Sambourne's head watched the elevator discharge a fresh load of diners. "We aren't even to give ourselves the trouble of walking from one deck to another. We must have our Pool Room, our Gymnasium, our Turkish Baths, in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean! And we dress as if we were going to the opera."

The big round glasses were lifted to the witnessing heavens, only to be barred out by the solidity of earthly splendour—the richly decorated ceiling of the dining saloon. "On board ship? We are afloat in the last new

Metropolitan Hotel. But for Americans these garish palaces wouldn't pay. We *like* all this. We are ready to pay fabulously for it. What is to become of the greatest Democracy when it is also the most luxurious people in the world?"

Mr. Sambourne, as well, had watched for years the building of these great liners, each one more costly, more vast, than the one before. The two men exchanged views as to the scale on which the costliness had risen—Sambourne dealing confidently with the money aspect, Marriott regarding the matter merely as a sign and portent. His final placing of it in this light was emphasized by a terrific crash that drowned all else. Only the band! beginning to play with reckless fury. Marriott threw up his head as if he had been personally assaulted. He caught Camilla's eye. She smiled. He shrugged philosophically. But he had smiled too. She felt it extraordinarily kind of the Looker-On to smile with her.

When the blaring of brass, and the shrieking of strings, had ceased for an interval, she was aware that Leroy, not able to make Mrs. Hurst hear above the din, had joined in the talk of the other two men. He appeared to be defending America. "Well, anyhow, you can't say we don't grow some mighty good-lookin' people over on our side. Specially women."

Why did he say specially women, Mr. Mariott asked. "I should say specially men. The younger generation, that is."

Marriott and Leroy argued it. Leroy held we were an indistinguishable medley. Marriott, that with great definiteness we were evolving two distinct types. Either the climate or some admixture of aboriginal blood, had set a Red Indian stamp on the faces of our men. He instanced one public character after another—the high cheek-bones, hawknoses, keen eyes, thin lips. Then the other—the later development. It was one of the most

curious things in the world. Had they seen the composite photographs of college classes? He had been looking at several. You proved yourself old-fashioned if you spoke of American youth now as weedy, dyspeptic, with indeterminate features and awkward gait. Mr. Marriott admitted that he himself had gone to college with such young men. "I was one of them," he laughed. A different story today! Athleticism in the last generation bears her visible fruit in this. Athleticism and the freest play yet accorded to women's choice.

Leroy appeared to be intrigued by this theory. He took some trouble to maintain that woman's choice had very little to do with it. "Some of the ugliest baboons I know have got the handsomest wives."

"Exceptions." And Marriott quoted his friend Tavernier, the eminent Hellenic archæologist. After a lifetime spent in contemplation of classic plastique, he had gone over to America to lecture, as they all knew, the year before. "He told me he saw in those young men at our principal seats of learning, the evolving of a race physically nearer to the Greek of old than any human product the world can show. But we start, he said, better than we end. Too early the fine column of the neck is thickened, the bold curve of the jaw is lost in jowl, the clean line from the chest down yields to convexity, slim flanks are hams. If you except the different facial type, you have more John Bull figures in middle-aged America than in Britain. But take the best of our young men at their best, with the days of training not too far behind, and you are face to face with a product that justifies for you that time-marked phrase, 'the pride of manhood.' This physical pride, he maintained, has come to seem quite curiously American. For it is leagues away from the swelling assumption of the officer class in Middle Europe. And as far from French youth, which is lighter, more elastic, more intellectual. In the Briton, too, physical pride is more subsidiary to other prides.

If a Briton is insolent it isn't because he is physically a fine specimen. Any such tendency would appear to be chastened early, in the last place you would expect—in the public schools. But with us the primitive joy in physical perfection is all undimmed. We get at, not beauty only, but life, through the eye. It isn't for nothing," Marriott laughed, "that America is the Paradise of the Movies."

Whether he was in earnest or not, Camilla couldn't decide, but he pretended to trace all this back to the American woman's preoccupation with outward appearance. "Her own first"—Marriott waved a hand towards the brilliantly dressed throng—"then her children's. Nowhere out of the East was the tyranny of clothes so uncontested as in America. For generations the American woman abroad has been called the best turned out in Europe. Foreigners don't know that she has converted the American man. He, not the Englishman, is today the most universally well dressed man in the world."

"You have been saying some very nice things about our men," Camilla said later as they were leaving the table.

"Well," he answered, "didn't I have an inspiring text in the man at the foot of the table?"

Camilla smiled.

All the usual life was in full swing the next morning. Where the promenading and betting on the run left off, quoits, billiards, shuffle-board began. Card parties at all hours, and dancing after dinner every night. Others laid covetous hands on Mrs. Hurst. She was speedily translated to the greater glory of lunching and dining in private with the Dallas party. Though Leroy couldn't prevent that, he had marked the lady for his own. They spent most of the time together.

She had passed Camilla sitting by herself with a book, the very first morning—and hadn't stopped, perhaps hadn't recognized Mrs. Trenholme, in her close little

capote, and high fur collar. But Mr. Marriott recognized her, as he went by with Jim in the swarm of after-breakfast promenaders. Marriott touched his cap and fell out of the ranks a moment to say good-morning. Jim waited, too. He had shared breakfast with Camilla an hour before, and had tucked her up in her chair, after confiding his special and personal grounds for enthusiasm about Mr. Marriott. Jim had left his parents in Paris and gone with a college friend on a little tour in Northern Europe. In the course of it, he had looked up his cousin, Ogden Marriott's First Secretary.

"Oh, he's *great!*" and Jim hadn't meant the First Secretary.

After good-morning and the usual inquiries as to seaworthiness, Marriott turned to find Jim appropriated by a couple of young ladies, in long open coats showing tremendously smart frocks. On some pretext they carried Jim down the deck.

"Formally adopted as 'one of my young men,' and now"—Marriott made a gesture of whimsical understanding—"he abandons me."

How nice men were to one another, she thought, as the Looker-On stood there, watching with a blend of curiosity and solicitude the boy's participation in the life of the ship. "A scene," he said, "that, however familiar, keeps still a touch of strangeness, from its own impermanence and its background of the impermanent sea." His eyes left the shining, tumbling waters, and took on a more intimate, friendlier look, as they came back to Jim Sambourne. "That boy keeps reminding me of my own youthful crossing—and of the amazing changes."

"What is so different, here on deck?"

"You wouldn't understand," he smiled down at her. "You'd have to be my age."

"You aren't *half* as old as I expected," said Camilla, intending encouragement.

"Oh, I'm not?" he laughed, but he must have divined the fact that the young wife, sitting alone in the early morning sunshine, was excited and pleased at the idea of a *tête-à-tête* with the Looker-On. For on this very first day he began with the habit of dropping into the deck chair labelled *Mr. L. Trenholme,* and so seldom honoured by that gentleman's presence.

In default of Leroy, it was pleasant to have Mr. Marriott sitting there, talking his wise talk and keeping less desirable persons at a distance.

She came to include among these Mr. Sambourne, without in the least analysing the reason. It was uncomfortable, and it was incongruous, to feel like that towards any old family friend, let alone Roy's "sort-of-uncle," as he privately called Granger Sambourne.

If there was a disposition on anybody's part nowadays to insist upon the relationship, it certainly wasn't on Mr. Sambourne's. Camilla had tested that. After being broken in to the agitating need of addressing Mr. Trenholme as father, she could have borne the lesser cross of claiming Mr. Sambourne as her uncle. She put it to him. Was she to?

"Call me *uncle?* Heavens, no!"

He seemed to be so entirely revolted at the idea that her slow curiosity was roused. "Why not?"

He turned his head from side to side as if his collar troubled him. "It is the most unromantic of relationships. Even if I am not romantic, you are. I decline to be your uncle."

When he came on deck that first morning he was not pleased, Camilla felt, at finding Mr. Marriott in Leroy's chair. But he stood in front of them with coat thrown back and generous proportions well displayed, and "took it out" of the passengers.

Mrs. Sambourne, on her way to join a bridge party, appeared along with eleven o'clock bouillon. It was a

moment of renewed animation. People sat up straighter in their reclining chairs. Camilla too, for this was about the time Leroy would make his appearance.

"He keeps very early hours in New York," she assured Mr. Marriott. "But on board ship he sleeps late. The sea air, I suppose?"

"Sea air!" repeated Mr. Sambourne, exchanging glances with his wife. "It's because he sits up playing poker and imbibing cocktails till all hours."

Camilla looked at Mr. Marriott.

"What we would like to hear," said that gentleman, "is, how Mr. Sambourne *knows!*"

Camilla smiled at him. Nice man, Mr. Marriott. And she craned her neck to look for Leroy. Whatever he did and however late he did it, he always came out looking the pink of condition. "*There* he is!"

Again Mr. Sambourne was ready with one of his meaning looks. It convinced Leroy's wife of childishness.

But other people's arrested glances said the same as Camilla's: "There he is!"

Leroy stood near the entrance lighting a cigarette while Henry Dallas talked to him—not realizing, poor little man, what he looked like beside the other.

Roy in the sunlight! What other being bore so well the searching light of morning? As he stood there with squared shoulders, turning up his face to puff out rings of smoke, Camilla's joy in his physical fitness recalled the phrase Marriott had used the night before, "the pride of manhood." She wouldn't have understood the full glory of that if she hadn't known Leroy. And in a moment, at the first pause in Mr. Dallas's talk, she would get up and join her husband. Before all those other eyes that openly or covertly were watching, admiring, she would in effect say publicly, loudly, *he's mine!*

While she was disentangling herself from her rug, Mrs. Hurst dropped down from nowhere at Leroy's side. When Mr. Dallas walked away, Mrs. Hurst and Leroy

leaned over the ship's rail, she looking down at the water, he looking down at her—and saying things.

"Wouldn't you like to walk?" Mr. Marriott said to Camilla who had remained sitting. "The other side is best."

Camilla followed him. Quite a brand-new friend, and yet, she felt instinctively, this old-fashioned gentleman was minded to spare her the sight of Leroy's devotion to the Englishwoman.

She longed to reassure Mr. Marriott—to tell him it had all happened over and over again. And it meant—just that Leroy was *the* person every woman wanted to keep at her side.

Then in a week he'd forget them all.

You just waited until the week was over. And on a fast boat like this, it was less than a week. It was sometimes under five days.

. . . . . .

"We'll dock about sunset tomorrow," Leroy had said at luncheon on the fourth day out. Now the meal was over. The promenading was over. People had scattered—Jim and his young friends to the upper deck to play shuffle-board; others had gone back to the bridge tables; many had settled down to a book and a doze.

Camilla opened her half-shut eyes and glanced about.

Where was Leroy? Anyway he was coming for her to play quoits presently. "Any fool," he had said, "can play *quoits.*"

Every smallest detail of that last afternoon was fixed for ever in her memory. The look of the sea as the ship performed her elephantine heel-and-toe motion, swinging up and sliding down huge rounded hills of water. "Like switchbacking over the South Downs," Mr. Marriott had looked up from his Mercure de France to say.

She didn't know what the South Downs were, but she nodded, quite sure they were of gentle contour and of a soft grey-green like the swelling, falling, surges revealed

with rhythmic regularity through the abhorred plate glass of the promenade deck.

She wasn't the least sleepy, in spite of broken rest, but she closed her eyes. Leroy. While she waited there for him, her thoughts swung back to the night before—or rather to the small hours of that very morning, when she had wakened to that old sound. Leroy, labouring and moaning in his sleep. Out of bed in a flash, and through the open door of the adjoining cabin. "Leroy!" she bent over him. Still he groaned and struggled rigidly like a prisoner tightly bound. "Dear," she shook him and called in his ear. She tried to pull him up to a sitting position. He was terribly heavy. He slipped back with a sound of anguish that nerved her. She put her clasped hands over his head, braced herself and dragged him up. "Leroy! *Leroy—!*" "What the devil . . . !" he opened his eyes. "Oh, was I . . . ? Good girl." And he slipped down again. But his heavy eyes followed her: "What do you want to go away for?" She came back with her dressing-gown and sat on the side of his berth. "I believe your things fit you too tight," she said. "Interferes with circulation, and that's why you dream!" She bent over and undid the top button of his sleeping jacket. She turned it away from his throat and released the splendid column of his neck. It gleamed white as porcelain. In the electric light it showed the same hard sheen as porcelain, that look of polish. Mr. Marriott was right. A wonderful piece of beauty was a human being at his best!

Curious how little the stories made of the beauty of men. Was that because when men wrote they were aware more of the beauty of women? And when women wrote, they perhaps thought it indelicate to dwell on the physical side of men's attractiveness.

Did she, "having Leroy," think more than most of these things? No. She recalled the talk of Miss Holroyd's young ladies—

Leroy had told her that the talk of boys was more frankly physiological. But she knew that the "good points" of the various young men discussed at school had for the most part little or nothing to do with mental or moral characteristics. After all, sight does travel quickest. Long before any other "witness," the eye puts in its testimony and has prejudiced the jury of the other senses.

Leroy put his arms over his head and stretched. "Good thing we're going home, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"'Yes,'" he mimicked her and then relented. "Look here, Milla, I've been thinking. When we get back—we might try to do more things together."

"I'd like that."

"Well, what? You never seem to have any ideas."

She sat convicted. "But then you have so many."

"Humph! If only you had a little initiative! Some 'go'!"

She sat, trying to invent opportunities to display a newly-acquired 'go.'"

"The only thing you ever want to do is to ride."

"I can play billiards."

"Yes, but do you do it well? You ought to practise."

"All right, I will."

"And why don't you play cards?"

"I've never thought about it."

"Well, think of it now. And let's have some parties, shall we?"

"You didn't use to let me have people about."

"Well, we oughtn't to fall out of things . . . to stagnate." He looked at her and then suddenly opened his mouth and yawned. "But we shall."

Did he read in her face the thought: "He ought to have married some lively person—poor Leroy!" He drew her up against him. She put her head down, and was very quiet. She could feel the beat of his heart un-

der the thin silk of his sleeping jacket. As she lay there a wave of intolerable sadness flowed over her, as if she had a presentiment: this is the last time he will draw me up like this and hold me against him. The flood of sadness refused to be pent-up, it began to flow out of her eyes. She was angry with herself . . . and began agitatedly inventing things to say, when he should speak, and make her look at him again. Then the gentle breathing told her: he's asleep. Already! She could go now. But she didn't go. She lay there motionless a long, long time, thinking things out. "Why don't I make myself better company for him. I will." She laid plans. When at last she sat up, her tears had dried. "After all, you oughtn't to give me up for hopeless," she said silently to the sleeping face. "I'm twenty-one-and-a-half. I should think people can teach themselves a lot of things after they're twenty-one."

. . . . . .

"Have you done your mile?" Mr. Marriott was standing in front of her chair. "I've just been looking after that boy a little," he said, as though to account for not appearing before.

"How nice you are to Jim. Do you go about the world taking care of people?"

He looked at her: "I wish I could." They went up on the Captain's deck. Between the lifeboats and the ventilators, Jim, with a laughing, screaming group, was playing shuffle-board. A row of spectators, criticizing, applauding, calling score.

Camilla and Marriott walked on the starboard side till the wind changed and began blowing down particles of soot. When they had come below and were in sight of their chairs—in the front row where they'd been changed with the change in the wind—there was Mrs. Hurst in Marriott's, that is to say Leroy's place. Leroy with his back to the approaching pair was sitting on Mrs. Hurst's foot-rest.

The uppermost thought in Camilla's mind was that she was sorry Mr. Marriott should see that. He wouldn't understand. She suddenly felt a great desire that Mr. Marriott should understand. As he and she made their way along the narrow passage behind that first row of chairs Mrs. Hurst's laugh rang out. "That's because you're an American!" she said to Leroy.

"No, it's because I *must* write a letter before we get in."

Her eyes begged him not to go. "*You?*"

"Did you think I didn't know how?"

"What I think is that New York is casting her shadow before. When you get there do you turn into a painstaking millionaire too, like him?"—she motioned with her head towards Henry Dallas.

Camilla turned and smiled at her companion. Now, you can see how little there is in this, she seemed to say. Her actual words were: "Let us sit anywhere till tea." She dropped into one of the empty seats.

Mrs. Hurst was discussing the Dallas type of American. The terrible correctness of him. "Can you imagine Henry Dallas, or his wife, speaking to any one that hasn't been properly introduced? They're exactly like our royalties, only duller. And more afraid of coming against somebody they oughtn't. Call yourselves a Democracy—!"

Leroy defended the great Republic.

"Well, did you ever know any English family bothering to bring along on a sea voyage their own china, and linen, like your Dallas's?"

Leroy had never thought about it.

"Well, think now, because it just shows. Before I knew they were going to make me come and mess with them in lonely splendour," the English voice went on, "I went down to book my place with the common herd." She described with some vivacity being mobbed in the companion-way and crushed to death at the dining-room

door. "I asked a man *why* he pushed so. 'Don't you know,' I said, 'you're certain to get a seat?' He grunted at me 'But *where?*'—and fought his way out of sight. I made the same remark to a woman. 'Oh! I suppose *you're* at the Captain's table!' and she felled me. Two people snatched away my turn when at last I stood before the man who was giving out the place cards. And what do you think they all wanted? To sit at the Captain's table? Not at all. 'Can't we have a table to ourselves?' '*Why* can't we have a table to ourselves?' 'Well, who's *at* this table?' The patience of that saintly steward! He read the names. He recommended the people they belonged to. I seemed to be the one person on the ship," said the daughter of a hundred Earls, "who was willing to eat with my fellow-passengers."

"Why *should* you?" Leroy said.

"Why should I? Why, because I'm a real democrat and not a sham one like you Americans."

Camilla was too frankly pleased with this innocuous passage to make conversation to her companion. Marriott sat with his finger in his book, thinking his own thoughts.

She was conscious now that he was getting out of his chair and finding his feet. He stood with his back to her. "Well! where did you drop from?" He was shaking hands with—Linda!

Linda Carey in Lincoln green cloth made so plain as to disguise very little those beautiful lines the gods had given her. The short, full sleeved jacket opened on a white satin waistcoat and finished with a high satin stock. On her light chestnut hair, a white felt hat, with two green quills.

She pretended not to see Mrs. Trenholme, nor indeed anybody but "dear Mr. Ogden Marriott." She was graciousness itself. She flashed her perfect teeth in a succession of smiles as she looked at him out of narrow gleaming eyes with an air of significant devotion.

Mr. Marriott, with a slight twist of his ironic mouth, said something at which she bubbled out that infectious laugh. Leroy turned as if she'd clapped him on the shoulder.

"Linda!"

"Why Roy! whoever expected—!"

They stood staring at each other a moment and then: "Where in the name of—where have you *been* all this while?"

"Oh, I got on at the last station!" Then she explained her theory of ocean travel. "A time to get rested up. Such bliss to get away from letters and calls and *every*thing."

"What have you done with Carey?" Leroy inquired drily.

"Better ask what's Carey done with himself? Turned into a sort of Atlas. He's down there, holding up that hill at Panama."

"And you?"

"Oh! I've been playing about in Paris; visiting our Leicestershire friends on the way back." She gave news of them.

"Strikes me you spend a good deal of time over there."

"Why not? Sort of thing I've always wanted to do," she explained to Marriott, "ever since I was ten and one of Miss Holroyd's girls went abroad and married a Scotch peer. *You* remember Anna Whitcomb—married Lord Firth."

Yes, Mr. Marriott remembered. He suddenly remembered Mrs. Trenholme, too, and turned. But Camilla appeared to be as lost in her book, as Leroy was lost in contemplation of the provocative vision in green and white.

Linda laughed again, at nothing, at life, at Scotch lords, at Leroy—a bubbling, all-inundating laugh that bathed the ship as sunshine bathed the sea.

When Mr. Marriott had turned his eyes away again, Camilla raised hers. Oh, to laugh like that!

". . . always *did* have a sneaking affection for Britishers. Can't *abide* their women. And the way they dress. . . . Mercy! But the men. M'm! M'm! One of Lord Firth's brothers used to be in the Cabinet. When Anna came back to visit her New York relations she had endless stories. I used to insist on hearing, specially about the Prime Minister. Heavens, no! not *this* one. The bachelor one—before this man. Awfully fascinating, he sounded. All the women crazy about him. He could have married anybody, from a royal princess down. Nobody could make out what he was waiting for. I decided it was for me. I used to think I'd go to London and just make a business of marrying that man. But mercy! I never had time. Before I knew where I was, I was in love with Leroy and married to Carey."

Leroy laughed with her. "And who are you in love with now?"

She looked at him out of her narrow eyes.

"Why, with Carey, of course," said the diplomat.

"*Carey!* Certainly not. Carey's deserted me for Culebra Hill. But there's an Englishman . . ." She kissed her finger-tips. "He's coming over to see me this fall."

"I know that Englishman," Leroy said with impudent malice as he turned away. "Why, Camilla!"

She looked up from her book. "Yes?"

"Oh, is *that* Mrs. Trenholme? I didn't recognize you." The fascinating Mrs. Carey left Camilla to imagine herself ravaged beyond knowing by her three and a half years of matrimony.

. . . . . .

Light was shed that evening while her maid hooked Camilla's gown. Mrs. Carey had been on board half an hour by the time the Trenholmes got there, so Mrs. Carey's maid reported. Mrs. Carey had also taken passage at the last moment. "She looks out of the port and sees you. She claps her hand to her face: 'And me all

swollen up with this abscess in my tooth,' she says, and pulls the shutter across the window. She's lived on slops and lain in her berth and read novels by electric light all day. Every night at midnight she's put on a veil and walked on deck for an hour. To keep her figure—so her maid says."

The swelling had certainly gone down to-day. Behold Mrs. Carey, coiffed and dressed and come forth to conquer!

. . . . . .

They were steaming slowly into New York Harbour. Camilla was on deck, Ogden Marriott helping her to verify the familiar landmarks as they came in view.

"Yes, but don't look at the Woolworth, look at Trinity and tell me when I shall see you again."

"I don't know what our plans will be. Leroy means to go and see after his horses as soon as he can leave New York."

"And shall you go and see after horses too?"

"Oh, yes!"

"But not at once?"

"I don't know." She hadn't waited till now to wonder if this would end like other, lesser, friendships. She had begun two or three since her marriage. But whether they were with women or with men, Leroy had been prompt to nip in the bud each one in its turn.

Had she taken that to heart? Yes, with a regretful joy. For in a way she was flattered. Though she was not proof against feeling the loss, in her singularly empty life, of each promise of a new interest, neither had she ever yet been proof against the all-devouring egoism which Leroy had named his need to have Camilla to himself. She wasn't able now, to deceive herself as to the fate of her latest friendship. Ogden Marriott's being old enough to be her father wouldn't shield him long. She had kept reminding herself in these last hours on board that as soon as ever Leroy awoke to the fact of this man's

kindness for her, that moment would see the pleasant new relationship at an end.

And for the first time such a thought had power to depress her.

"I should like to come and see you, if . . ." Marriott began, realizing some hesitation in her face, "if you—"

"Oh, *I'd* like you to very much!"

"You would? Then I will. When?"

"I . . . can't be quite sure."

"Well, I'll take my chance some day," he said, plainly chilled.

The thought of his appearing gave her less pleasure than the thought of his being snubbed by Leroy gave her pain. "I . . . don't have very much time to myself."

"But I suppose in the afternoon, about four or five—"

"Well, I don't know." She spoke anxiously. "My husband and I will be playing a good deal of golf. I'd better write. Oh!"—her embarrassment fell away into childish delight—"look, Mr. Marriott, there's my father—up at that window over the dock crowd." She waved her handkerchief.

"You seem to like your father," said the quiet voice at her side.

"Roy, dear—there's father!" He didn't hear. His head was bent. Linda's too. The pretty, discontented mouth was moving. She was speaking rapidly—

CHAPTER XI

IT occurred to Camilla that her father had grown graver for all his pleasure at having her back.

Julia had gone to California to visit Lucy. Grandfather had had a fall from his horse—but he had written that he was mending rapidly and "didn't want anybody bothering round." Camilla and her father laughed at the sounding of the characteristic note—and after that, the news was all for Leroy. It had to do with railroads, and such like dull affairs.

Not dull for the two men. Heavens! how absorbed they were.

The home-coming synchronized with a time of great financial strain in those markets of main interest to George Charlton and the firm of Trenholme. The transformation foretold by the already forgotten Mrs. Reginald Hurst had taken place. Leroy leapt into the breach like a young gladiator. Early and late he was at the office.

More often than not, about six o'clock in the evening, he would telephone to Camilla: "Got to see some men at the Club for my father," or: "Going to dine with the Governor."

His father leaned on him more than ever. Leroy took in his stride heavy responsibilities which weighed the older man to earth.

"Trouble is, you slave-drive yourself," he admonished his father. "Bad economy, never to let up."

"I do let up. I keep most punctual hours."

"*That's* not letting up. Letting up is getting your mind clear off the rails. Come and dine at the club and go to the Casino."

It wasn't his father's way. The Casino bored him.

It didn't bore Linda.

. . . . . .

Camilla's pleasure in her beautiful New York house for the first time clouded. Roy was never there except to sleep.

"Golf! My dear child, do try a little to understand what a business crisis means to people like us."

And another time: "*Parties?* Good God, haven't I already *told* you," and then that gesture of half comic, half tragic despair.

Well, she would have the more time for her father. She pictured herself tiding over this interval, before she and Leroy should go South by seeing a great deal of her father. She perceived now more clearly than ever before —and with a wounding sharpness of outline—how she had neglected him in his loneliness. Now in the loneliness that closed about her in these days, she found her heart turning to him with penitence and hope.

He was kind. Oh, he was angelically kind. And that was the worst of it. Instead of needing her, he made sacrifices to spare her an hour here, a half-hour there. And so she learned that, however great the need one being has of another at a given time, if the tie is broken the day most surely comes when the need has lapsed. George Charlton was absorbed by the growing magnitude of his enterprises. He, too, was now among the millionaires.

In that void which people more important than Camilla may find for the first time, on returning after months of absence, nobody seemed to have any need for her. Nobody had any time for her—unless it was Mr. Sambourne. Oh, yes!—though he spent several hours a day at the Stock Exchange—*he* always had time. He took her to see pictures. He dropped in to tea.

And *that* wasn't a success. He meant to be nice, but somehow he wasn't. He was "different" in a not easily verifiable fashion, when he was alone with you. He was, on these occasions, like the medium he once told her about, who in trance was taken possession of by another

spirit, and spoke in a different voice, matter clean out of the ken of the medium.

Camilla gave up being at home at Mr. Sambourne's calling hour. After she had shopped and left a card or two, she would let the car set her down at the entrance to the park and would walk for an hour. In the evenings she read, and made a little music "all by herself." It was better than going out to parties, so she told Mr. Sambourne, while poor Roy was hard at it.

"Hard at what?"

"Why, his work at the office."

Mr. Sambourne had laughed. It was after that she took to being out between three and six. All the same, what *did* Roy do with his time? The longest hours at the office left something to be accounted for.

"I suppose," she said at breakfast—they had been home six weeks—"I suppose today will be like the other days?"

"How 'like'?"

"You won't be able to come home and do anything with me."

"Now how can I?" he said in an exasperated tone.

"No—no"—she soothed him. "I only meant—I thought . . . I'd telephone and see if . . . Mr. Marriott is in town."

"Well, why not? Fellow like that, *he's* got nothing else to do but— Say! look at the clock!" He kissed her and was gone.

It wasn't by any means the first time she had thought of telephoning to Mr. Marriott. But always hitherto she had been deterred. Too fresh, too uncomfortable, the recollection of that excuse she had made: "So very little time. My husband and I—"

Now she found this chance acquaintance taking on the aspect of Helper Over the Stile, Resolver of problems unnamed and unnameable, which yet, under his kind eyes, at the touch of his stored wisdom, would melt and vanish.

So do we pay our unconscious tribute to the richness, the underlying miracle of human association—when to some stranger, or to some one little known until the hour strikes, we look for this large service. And incredible, but true, the gods allow that, here and there, the looking is not vain. Camilla was all-unconscious still that, as if in compensation for her lacks and failures, she was the type of woman to prompt in men this finer chivalry. She had no reason to offer for her faith. She was as sure that Mr. Marriott would help her in her trouble, as though she had been sounding the depths of his goodwill all her days.

But no, she wouldn't telephone. To write was easier in view of that now shamefaced boast of "my husband" and "no time." Merely to invoke him on a sheet of paper brought her comfort. After all, perhaps she wouldn't mail the letter.

"I'll just see."

The rest of the morning sped in the choosing of new curtains for the parlour. The sun had faded the old ones. She liked the new shade. But Leroy had thought they looked "dejected."

An increasing restlessness drove her out again in the middle of the afternoon. Near the obelisk, in the park, about half-past four she came upon Mr. Sambourne.

As she watched him approach, bearing with a certain gallantry his disciplined stoutness, she was conscious of a lifting of that veil, which "being accustomed" weaves about the persons of our familiars. She had known Mr. Sambourne since her babyhood. He had never been aware of her till that Easter Sunday that brought her and Leroy together under his roof. She in her turn seemed never to have seen Mr. Sambourne clearly until now. This might be partly due to the fact that, out here in the open spaces his note was more than ever that of the Shining One. From the fine skin with its silvery lights, from the glistening eye, from his grey

"Van Dyke" beard, very *soigné,* his shining linen, and the grey cloth he affected in the daytime, shining too, with pearly tints; from the top of the glossy silk hat he had lifted hailing her, down to the turned-out toes of his patent leather shoes, Mr. Sambourne shone, brave in the afternoon light.

"Aha, I've caught you!" He pretended to believe she had come to meet some one.

"If not, what are you doing here?"

She had thought, she said, of going to have another look at the Morgan collecton.

"Come along, then," he spoke as if that had been his errand also.

They left the pictures and were standing in front of the roped-in collections of old French furniture. Mr. Sambourne was at home here. He spoke with a critical knowledge of the achievements of Gouthière and of Rousseau de la Rottière. He compared the things by Boulle after designs by Bérain, with those after Caffieri in the time of the later Louis. He must have seen in Camilla a dawning of that passion for the French antique which grew upon her in after years. He interrupted his little disquisition, with a transference of his liquid gaze from these faded glories to Camilla's face: "Ah, now you are less depressed! Come and dine with me to-night."

She was sorry—

"Why not?"

"Leroy . . . I never know whether—"

The whip of memory flicked her before Sambourne's tongue did, with its "You don't 'know whether'? I should think you might! By now. Anyhow come and have a cup of tea. There's a new place—"

Should she? One hand left her muff and went down into the deep pocket of her coat. Momentary contact with a sealed letter (which she hadn't been sure till that moment would ever reach the mail) was the main factor

in her decision. Tomorrow *he* would be there. The knowledge brought security, an all's well into the perplexed unfriended mind.

"To tea? Why, yes."

. . . . . .

This was better than going home to an empty house. The "new place" was certainly cheerful, and very gorgeous in its bizarre fashion. The only part of the long tea-room that wasn't crowded was the cleared space down the middle, a space separated on both sides from the serried rows of tables by a narrow parterre of flowers and shrubs set in rustic tubs, or in pots of Italian faience.

Mr. Sambourne was very particular as to where he sat. The waiters seemed to know this characteristic.

"Your table, sir"—the head waiter came hurrying towards Mr. Sambourne—"ready for you in half a minute, sir."

After they had sat down Mr. Sambourne continued to stare about. Presently he discovered whatever it was he had been looking for. With an air of smiling satisfaction he set himself to make up to his companion for those moments of distraction.

He became facetious. He remarked upon her looks. She was glad when the music began.

"I can't hear you"—she said, thinking that perhaps she had misunderstood that last speech. "What is this they're playing?"

"You don't know it? Then you're the only human being in New York who doesn't."

"Let me listen."

"You can do more than listen," he said as a young lady and gentleman stepped out into the flower-bordered space and began to dance a two-step. Other couples joined them.

"What a funny time to be dancing."

"Again, my dear, you enjoy the distinction of being the only person in New York who thinks so."

She asked who the dancers were.

"Oh just anybody who belongs to the club."

The dancers strolled back to their tables. The buzz of talk and laughter filled the short interval.

"You mean to say you haven't heard, haven't seen in the papers, that all New York has gone dancing-mad?"

Of course she'd read— Seen the pictures, too, in *Life* and *Judge*. But they hadn't made any such impression on her as *this*.

Oh, this! This was nothing. "They're at it in the houses of the Four Hundred. They're at it in the back alleys, old and young; middle-aged men who've never danced before in their lives—taking lessons in the new dances." He spoke with the derision of the person who has been an adept since childhood. "The new Club is the dancing club. It's an epidemic."

"Well, it's a nice kind," said Camilla feeling the heaviness of the last weeks lifting from her shoulders. "I love dancing."

Vaguely he recalled a light-footed little figure—the smallest of the Charlton girls—waltzing with his own children at Christmas parties in the South. And there was that memorable vision—Camilla at the Plumstead-Atherley ball.

"You couldn't possibly dance as you do," he said, "if you *didn't* love it. Why don't you belong? Shall I propose your name?"

She reflected, "I don't know if Leroy—"

"If Leroy, what?"

"If he'd like this kind of club." *She* didn't like Mr. Sambourne's smile. "What's this they're playing now . . .?" she asked.

"You told me you'd never seen the Tango. That's really why I brought you!"

The band played for several minutes before two couples had sorted themselves out from among the tables and made their way round to the opening in the flowery barrier.

It was queer music—nervous; reckless; vulgar—the kind that at first induces in the unaccustomed a mental chaos, and then, catching the hearer unstrung, imposes upon his distracted state an obscure hypnotism. You smile wanly at the rudest assaults. You sit and endure indignities without power of protest. That music . . . she could hear it now! It hopped and jigged. It smacked you in the face. It turned a somersault and came up making a long nose at you.

"Good! Good!" Everybody was applauding.

"They *do* know how to play these rag-time things," Mr. Sambourne said.

But the clapping was for the dancing.

Camilla looked on, imperturbable.

"I'm afraid you don't like it as much as you expected. Wait, you may see it *perfectly* done in a minute—"

"By professionals?"

"Oh, not *here*—but there are one or two as good as the best."

"Why there's Linda—Mrs. Carey!" She was tangoing with Mr. Denton, a young man Camilla remembered seeing at those same Plumstead-Atherley parties before her marriage. She watched the pair now, to the exclusion of everybody and everything else—penetrated gradually by the sense that though Linda danced with Denton, she wasn't dancing *for* him. Not upon her partner was she lavishing her airs of conquering Grace, nor the audacity which just saved itself, the malice, the lure, the abandonment. For whom was it then—all this?

There was no telling "whom," but easy to say "where." On this side, beyond the clump of palms. As the astronomer detects by its reaction on the visible planets, the unseen star, long before it swings into the field of the telescope, so had Camilla the clearest conviction of the presence of this person, this unseen Other, as she caught again that turn of Linda's neck, and the narrow gleam of the long eyes over young Denton's shoulder.

How *could* a woman say so much in public before all these staring strangers—?

She sat stone-still, following every movement of the two as they made their way back, through continuous clapping, to their table, behind the palms. Camilla leaned back in her chair—craning her neck. "Why—there's Leroy!" she half rose.

"Don't make a scene!" Mr. Sambourne had seized her hand and held it down on the table.

"Make a scene! Why should you think—what is there to make—?"

"Oh! all right. Quite right. Sit down. People are looking—"

"But I must just go and speak to Leroy."

"Speak to him!"

"Let him know I'm here."

Again oblivious of the fact that the people nearest were looking at them, he held her hand. "I can't allow you to do anything so crazy. If you must speak to him—though I strongly advise you not to—wait till you get home. You'd *far* better, if you'll take the advice of a much older person—a man who is very fond of you, my dear—you won't let him know that you've seen him here."

"Oh I couldn't not let him know."

"If you give yourself time, you'll see you'd a great deal better not."

He had said it with an oppressive significance.

"Have you finished?" she said in a moment. "Shall we go?"

Mr. Sambourne looked at her with curiosity, as he shifted the cigar to the other side of his mouth and held his head on one side to avoid inhaling too much of his own smoke, while his hands were busy with his pockets. The attitude gave him the air of regarding Camilla sideways as if to get another light upon a person slightly enigmatic. He drew out a roll of bills. When he had paid: "Now, what do you want to do?"

"Why, go home."

"Good." He shed an approving smile on the person who had taken his advice. He rose as she did and waited a moment for the waiter to gather up muff, handkerchief, and purse, which had slipped to the floor unheeded.

"This way," he called as she turned. But Camilla seemed not to hear—seemed to think she was to lead the way. And she led it straight to the table where sat Linda and Leroy, another lady and the young gentleman of the Tango. Leroy stared for a second before, measurelessly astonished, he jumped up. He behaved well. He carried it off so competently that even Linda was plainly deceived. She shook hands—a little uncertainly—and then:

"Have you just come? Did you see me dance?"

"Yes—I—I saw you."

"She doesn't like it!" Linda tossed the incredible verdict out with a laugh. "She *doesn't* . . .!" and waited for the denial.

"I think I like other dances better."

"There *are* no other dances. Not to say *dances*. There are little glidings and teeterings. But to dance is to tango!" Linda proclaimed with shining eyes. "You must learn, Mrs. Trenholme."

"No!" said Camilla so abruptly that Linda started.

"What's your objection to it?" she demanded.

"Just that—I don't like it."

Still Linda waited for some intelligent reason. Everybody waited.

"It's too—un-beautiful," Camilla brought out. She saw that her answer had annoyed Leroy. She recognized the effort it cost him to pretend to be amused.

"I took my wife," he said, leaning over the back of his chair and smiling at Camilla, "to see a ballet just after we were married. She hadn't—if you can believe me—she hadn't been to a ballet."

"I'd been to plenty of operas," she defended herself.

He paid no attention. "This is Camilla looking at the ballet."

You couldn't say it was caricature. It was a most delicately done, but rather merciless, imitation. The air of inane inquiry, the faint frown. Not so much disapproval as sheer perplexity.

"In the middle of the great first march, the act of Presentation: 'What do you think of it?' says I. 'I'd like some dancing,' says Camilla, 'not just legs and legs.'"

They all laughed.

"And then when she gets dancing—" Denton began.

Leroy interrupted him, watch in hand.

"Have you got the limousine?" he said to her quite pleasantly.

"No, I came in a taxi."

. . . . . .

As they waited a moment in the lobby for the taxi to draw up, Camilla stole anxious looks at Leroy's set face. He had left every trace of his pleasantness in the tinkling, clanging room behind them. There had been nothing more in his kind looks than that instinct to keep up appearances, that fear of a scene, which women stumble upon in men with such infinite surprise. Oh dear! *She* hadn't kept up appearances when she told Mrs. Linda her dancing was ugly.

He handed her into the taxi with his usual punctiliousness and told the driver to go to 59th Street, in a tone of "Go to Hell"! The sudden change from the half-caressing accent of the ballet story jarred Camilla—agitated her. She sat far back in her corner as they went bumping along the ill-paved streets.

"Well!" he burst out, unable to wait upon her slower processes. "I suppose you've got something to say!"—and then he tightened his lips and seemed to brace himself.

"To say? Yes. I want you to understand."

He nodded. "Well.... You want me to understand—"

"You *do* understand, don't you, I'm not criticizing anybody else who wants to?"

"Wants—to—what?"

"Why, to dance the Tango."

"The Tango!" He couldn't have seemed more bewildered if he had never heard the word before. "Tango—?"

"I don't want to criticize other people."

"Oh, that," he mocked, "that's very kind of you."

"No, it's not kind. It's only trying to make you see I realize that Tango-ing . . . suits some people. It's *like* them."

He turned sharply and looked at her.

"What do you mean?" The low fierce voice made her shrink back further still in her corner.

"I mean, that for people who are very lively and gay it's a . . . a natural enough mood. I don't seem to have that sort of mood. So if I tango-ed I'd be pretending—sort of lying."

"H'm!" was all he answered.

It was very hard to make him understand. In a final effort she brought out: "I might as well be an actress."

"Oh, you think that tops the climax of the undesirable?"

"Well, it must be very awful to have to make a practice of being something you aren't."

He sat so very quiet that suddenly remorse swept her like a sudden gust.

"Oh, Roy, I'm so sorry."

"Sorry," he echoed with a new sharpness of suspicion. "Sorry about what?"

"I . . . I forgot Isabelle."

"Oh, that's all right. I've forgotten her too."

. . . . . .

Still more easily, Camilla told herself, would he forget Linda.

But that night she posted her note to Mr. Marriott.

CHAPTER XII

SHE stayed in the next morning that she might answer in person Mr. Marriott's telephone call.

By luncheon time she was saying: "He means just to walk in at four or five o'clock."

She came home at half-past three that afternoon.

At seven o'clock she went slowly upstairs to dress.

Nobody had come.

She spent the evening alone.

. . . . . .

Leroy threw down a morning paper after breakfast. "By-bye," he said. "If anybody wants me after 6.30, tell 'em to telephone to Madison Avenue. The Governor and I've got the Western directors of the new road dining tonight." She sat looking stupidly at the coffee-pot.

He went towards the door, hands in his pockets, humming the *Merry Widow*. In the middle of a bar he broke off: "Why don't you telephone Tina to come and dine?"

Camilla shook her head. "Her husband wants her."

Roy shot a look in her direction. When he had satisfied himself that less malice than stumbling stupidity had happened upon that retort: "Ask 'em both," he suggested.

Again she shook her head.

"Well, some of those girls you went to school with. Look here, why don't you make friends? I never knew anybody—any *nice* person—have so few friends."

She could easily have answered: "You used not to let me." In the face of sudden pleasure, or sudden pain, silence was the instinctive shelter of her soul. She was silent now.

"By the way, I made inquiries for you yesterday. Ogden Marriott went back by the next ship." Still she

didn't say anything. It was irritating. "I suppose you knew."

No, she didn't know.

"Well, by-bye."

. . . . . .

Later she realized that Linda had run Roy very hard all those weeks before and after Christmas. At home he was more variable than ever—exacting and bitter-tongued; remorseful and indulgent; tender, adorably kind.

He gave her a new motor car. He insisted on going with her himself to choose her sables. He spent as much time over the set of the high collar as if it had been a railroad concession. Then for ten days she wouldn't see him except for those glimpses of his absorbed face behind a newspaper at breakfast.

As she looked back, she remembered there were times when he must have wanted to talk about Linda. He'd quote her clever speeches. "Met Linda this afternoon—corner of 34th Street. She walked up with me. Wants to see *Carmen*. I've told 'em to keep a box tomorrow night. Will you come?"

"Why, yes, of course."

. . . . . .

Linda's surprise. A sulky Linda through half the opera. A pleased, half-mocking Roy, with a serve-you-right sort of air.

Serve her right for what? Linda very sumptuous in white satin and pearls, a pearl comb in her chestnut hair, turning her back a little ostentatiously on her hosts and staring out at the occupants of the other boxes. Suddenly, all smiles and excitement, she was making signals towards a box across the amphitheatre. Roy leaned out to see the cause of all this animation.

"Uncle Granger," he reported, "with the Dallas's."

"Uncle Granger!" reported Linda. "It's my Englishman." She signalled again. There was a general

movement on the part of the Dallas's to bring their party round to the Trenholmes. Linda radiant. "His name" —she turned to Mrs. Trenholme, in plenitude of pleasure forgiving that young woman her presence—"his name's Nancarrow. Michael Nancarrow. Sister married a title. They're an awfully good old family. Admirals, and all that kind of thing. Father refused a peerage. Can't tell you why. Maybe he was too old to know better. But Michael is perfectly fascinating. You'll see!" she said to Roy, taking her turn at the serve-you-right air.

"Oh, I *have* seen," he answered negligently. "Dallas brought him into the club today. He came over in Lord Bethune's yacht. Bethune's got some finance scheme on with the Dallas firm. The long-legged chap is just hanging round amusing himself."

"The long-legged chap, as you call him, is a true blue sportsman. He asked me this very afternoon if I didn't want to go for a cruise round the Florida Keys and fish for tarpon!"

"Asked *you!* True sign of a true blue sport," was Roy's comment.

They wrangled till the knock on the door.

"Oh, *here* you are!" In the midst of general greetings Linda *affichéed* herself by the side of a tall fair man with regular features and quiet manners. She made a point of being the one to introduce him to Mrs. Trenholme. "Mr. Nancarrow's staying with the Dallas's," she said in an aside. "But *I* show him the sights. Don't I?"

His laugh was curiously pleasant. "You do indeed. I'm in great luck.

"It *is* luck, isn't it, Mr. Sambourne, for anybody delivered over to the . . ." She threw an audacious glance to the back of the box where Roy was engaging Mr. and Mrs. Dallas. "He'll see nothing with *them* but the kind of thing he's, what he'd call, fed up with at

home. Stodgy dinner parties and an opera he's been to half a dozen times at Covent Garden."

But the gentleman declared he'd never stayed with nicer people. Mr. Dallas was giving him "what Mrs. Carey would call the time of my life."

"Oh, you mean 'down town'!" She dismissed that dull region where Henry Dallas ruled.

"After all," said Sambourne, "it's 'down town' interests that have brought him over."

"Oh, *is* it?" said Linda with a smile and a twist of her mouth. "Much you know what's brought him over." She turned her back on Mr. Sambourne and Camilla, and sparkled and laughed under the steady grey eyes of the Englishman.

"He takes Linda," Mr. Sambourne dropped in Camilla's ear, "on the same basis as he takes the Woolworth and the Tango—with a good-humoured surprise. An air of being prepared for whatever may turn up. One thing as astonishing as another. It's all 'American.'"

He further reported that Linda, on the spur of the moment, had made up a party for "her Englishman" at the Club that afternoon. It had been a Linda at her vividest, in the full flush of glory at being the first woman of good standing to dance the Tango like a professional.

Oh, yes! Mr. Sambourne had been there.

Nancarrow liked it. At least, he said it was "topping."

"It's *what?*" Linda had asked.

"Ex*tro*rdin'ry," said the Englishman. "Best I ever saw off the stage."

. . . . . .

Most of the information as to how Linda sped with her Englishman in those next days, came through Mr. Sambourne.

Nobody, according to him, had ever seen Linda take so much trouble to please anybody as she took to please Michael Nancarrow. But as her sort of "trouble" was of

the light-hearted description, and as whatever she did she looked bewitching and usually made you laugh, Nancarrow (who seemed to like laughing in his quiet way quite as much as the more boisterous)—Nancarrow got on with her to a degree which, according to Mr. Sambourne, made people think she would have her way.

"Her way?" Camilla echoed. "But she's married."

"Don't think that will stand in Linda's 'way.'" Nothing would surprise Mr. Sambourne less than to hear she had all the business of divorce *en train*. "I know she's been asking legal advice. Carey, it may surprise you to hear—I'm sure it would surprise Carey—has deserted Linda."

As Camilla searched her heart, now, long after the event, she knew that she put up with Mr. Sambourne, yes, encouraged his dropping in, as the only means of hearing what was going on. All that she got from Leroy, she gleaned from irritable silence, and those morning glimpses of his face behind the newspaper; the tightened mouth; the jaw line firm to belligerency. If you had never seen that face transformed by tenderness and laughter, you'd be afraid of it.

She was afraid of it, now.

Mr. Sambourne came more and more. He would look in after dinner. Instead of sitting down, he would stand in front of her, smiling, and saying "Well?" He would have a gardenia in his coat and a fine colour in his smooth cheeks. His nearly white hair was still so abundant that when he had taken off his hat, the place where the hat-band had been, looked as if ironed against his head. The thick thatch on the scalp would have mounded itself a little, and that below where the hat-band had been, frothed out as a bird's sleek feathers blown outward by the wind. "Well?"

And when she answered with some banality, he would turn away and bring a chair. Too near sometimes.

He made her presents of books. Usually French. Sometimes he read bits aloud.

One night he looked about for a pen. "I'll write your name on the fly-leaf." He praised the pen. She wished he would put it down. How glossy his hands were! The skin on the somewhat puffed outsides wore the same silvery sheen as his white forehead. The nails were more than glossy. Their high polish gave them an oily look. Only his ease, and a kind of happy carelessness in intercourse carried off all the little betrayals of care behind the scenes. "How does he keep his hands so perfectly?" some one had asked.

"Oh! his wife's manicure attends to that," Linda had answered. "And he has a girl come to the office. She does his hands while he dictates."

"It isn't often I find a gold nib that suits my hand," he was saying, "I wish you'd give me this." Camilla was sorry to be so disobliging, but she couldn't. "I'll give you another," he urged, "half-a-dozen, if you like." She was sorry. He looked at her with those liquid brown eyes of his which, but for the glitter of his smile, would often have given an impression of dawning tears. "Why is this particular, and, if I may say so, wholly undistinguished-looking pen, so precious?"

"It's Leroy's."

"Oh, Leroy's! *That's* all right." He pocketed it.

"No, it isn't all right. Please put it back."

"Now look me in the eye, and tell me how often in a year does Leroy use this pen?" He tapped the outside of his pocket.

"It must be there when he wants it. You must put it back."

"You positively refuse me this perfectly trifling—"

"Yes. I am sorry. You mustn't take it, please."

He threw the pen in the tray. "I wonder what there is of yours he wouldn't let Linda make hay of!" Her face stopped him. "You mean you don't know that?"

Then it was his part, as her oldest friend, to enlighten her. He couldn't let people go on laughing at her. "Don't you *see* the change in Leroy? Only a few weeks ago Leroy still had his panics. 'She knows!' And you didn't know. He took less and less pains. Finally none at all. Still you didn't see. People won't believe that. 'You make her out too stupid,' they say. They don't know there are some women," he was beginning to lose hold on his self-control, "some women who will stand *any*thing."

"I'm not one of them," said Camilla.

"Oh, you aren't! Well, what is there left for a worm to turn at. When you know that he's thrown to the winds even public respect for you—"

"That is a lie."

The veins stood out under his fine skin. "And when I, as your friend, tell you what you ought in self-defence to have known long ago, that your husband is vieing with this Englishman in public for Linda Carey's favours, you"—the white of his prominent eyes turned pinkish—"you, not so inarticulate for once, tell me: That's a lie! Say it as quietly, by George, as another woman would say that is a prayer book. However tightly you shut your eyes, sooner or later—"

"Mr. Marriott," said the maid.

The blessing of that presence! Sambourne retreated before it, though in perfect good order. "I suppose," he said to Camilla, "I'll see you tomorrow at the Dallas's reception."

Ogden Marriott had come in with a curious air of purpose. Mr. Sambourne had felt it as an added excuse for leaving an uncongenial atmosphere. Camilla was herself so conscious of Mr. Marriott's having "come for something," that she almost said "What is it?" as if she expected him to answer, "Your chimney is on fire, we must carry out the valuables." She had seen his arrival in the papers, but she'd had no heart to make another

attempt to see him. And now he was here, walking restlessly about the room, examining the pictures and letting fall little absent-minded comments.

"Yes; I've been in New York two weeks," he said, "and I haven't been to see you. Bad! But you haven't been out of my mind—hardly a single waking hour."

"What reminded you of me?"

" 'Reminded!' " he smiled. "For one thing, I've been seeing a good deal, both of old friends and new acquaintances. I've gone out in the last ten days more than I have done in New York for years. And never anywhere have I seen you." He turned his back suddenly on the fine Constable he'd been admiring—"Why haven't I seen you?"

"I've been—a little bewildered. I haven't known just which way to go, so I've gone no way and nowhere." She found it quite easy to make this extraordinary admission to the man she knew so slightly according to usual canons.

"I see. You've been a little hurt."

"You've been hearing—?" She did shrink then.

"We all of us are a little hurt from time to time. Sometimes it is only by being hurt—seeing things as they are—that we are moved to mend them."

Oh, the comfort of him! If he'd pretended she hadn't been hurt at all, or had told her that the hurt was mortal, his coming would have been one more wound. He looked at her now through the owlish spectacles, and the reassuring, knowledge-balanced voice went on: "You are like a child playing in the long grass, who is stung by some invisible enemy." He smiled as much as to say we won't be more tragic over this than we can help. "Was it a sharp pin out of my sash? Was it a hornet? Was it a snake, perhaps? You incline to the adder theory and you are over-alarmed."

"Am I? *Am* I?"

"I believe so."

"But how can *you*—"

"Oh! at my age a looker-on knows a terrible lot. I admit there *are* those stinging insects about here, and I expect you've had enough."

"Oh, I've had enough! But what can I do?"

"Get out of this."

"Go away?"

"Go away."

"I could never go away and leave Leroy."

"Of course you couldn't. The whole point is: you must take Leroy."

"If I could! Oh . . . if I *could!*"

One moment it was the wildest dream. The next it looked almost likely.

"There's that place down in Florida you used to tell me about—that nobody looks after."

"Oh yes! we have a man looking after it."

"Not the right man. The right man is your husband. You are too pale. Tell him you want to go. *Tell him in such a way that he can't refuse.*"

He didn't stay over twenty minutes, and he left her soothed and friended. Yet when he had gone, she put her head down on the sofa back and wept.

For *her,* tongue-tied as she was, slow-witted, this task to tax the most eloquent, most ready! She went slowly down to the library, unlocked her own writing-table drawer and took out a heap of letters. Not so many, after all, when they were tidied. She and Leroy hadn't been apart enough for much writing. The little notes he had put under her door at the Sambournes' four years ago this Easter; the letters and telegrams—two, three, four sometimes a day had come while she was at Julia's before the wedding, and while they were seeing each other several times in every twenty-four hours.

She arranged little piles. She read some of the letters. Over one she took heart of grace. She drew her droop-

ing figure up as she folded and kissed it and laid it by itself. *Now* she could write to him.

It wasn't much after ten o'clock when she had finished and looked up blotting the last page. Who was that in the hall? If it were Mr. Sambourne . . . she would make no sign. She listened. It couldn't be Roy so early. But it was.

She went to the door and called him.

What was she doing down here, he asked.

"Writing to you."

"Writing to *me!* What's that for?" He spoke sharply.

But for the memory of Marriott's belief that she could do this thing, she would have fallen into the old dumbness. "Because I speak so badly," she heard herself say, quite steadily "And because I didn't know you'd be home so nice and early."

"H'm!" He came in drawing the white silk muffler from round his neck. He laid it on a chair and took a cigar out of his pocket. He looked at the cigar with attention, while he felt for his match-box. Empty. He went to the mantelpiece. Nothing. He looked round. "What's all this?" he said, coming over to the writing table. He took up the letter lying apart from the others, saw his own writing and was about to tear a piece off for a lighter.

"Oh, not that!" she put her hands over it. "I'd let you tear up everything I've got before I'd give you this."

"What is it?" He stared down at the thin sheet.

"The letter you put under the door the morning after we met."

As he stood awkwardly in the silence, an inspiration came to her. "It's my Best-of-all-Letter, but if you are very careful I'll let you look at it."

"No!" The word shot out brusque—as quick as an arm goes up to intercept the cut of a whip. "All old letters ought to be burnt by law."

"Not this. Never, never this!" She said it with a fervour so foreign to her that as he was turning away, he stopped, and looked at her, curiosity dawning on his tired face. What had he said in that foolish old letter, that so stirred the calm Camilla? He came back to her side. He opened the Best-of-all-Letter and was lost. Not Camilla's eloquence, his own, set the old chords vibrating.

"Give it back to me, dear. These are all your letters—and they're beautiful. But they're not like this." She took it from him and put it in her dress. "I never used to write to you," she said, smiling uncertainly, "but now . . . here is a letter from me."

He held it in his hand. He seemed afraid to open it. How tired he looked. Unhappy.

Perhaps he thought the same of her. "You've been crying," he said.

The tears sprang up again. "All the same, I'm happier tonight than I've been for a long, long time."

"Why is that?"

"Because I see daylight. Sunlight. Oh, Roy—Florida sunlight. It's shining over my old home. Please, dear, I want to go home."

"Well—"

"But I'll never go alone!" she added quickly. At that fell another of those silences, during which all sorts of delicate, difficult things find expression. "It is only if you'll take me that I shall ever see home again"—she clasped her hands—"ever see happiness again, I think."

It was the nearest she had come, or was to go, to upbraiding him.

A sleepy-looking butler opened the door. "You are wanted, sir, at the telephone."

"Who is it?"

The man's hesitation was eloquent.

"I said who *is* it?" Roy's voice was sharp.

"Mrs. Carey, sir."

"I'll speak to her here." As he lifted the receiver to his ear, "Where are you going?" he said with his eyes on Camilla.

"Upstairs."

"Wait a min . . . Yes, it's me . . . Oh, you did! . . . H'm! . . . A little late in the day, isn't it? . . . Couldn't possibly . . . No . . . not at all. . . . Didn't mind the least. . . . What? . . . Because I remembered an engagement. . . . Where? Why, here at home. . . . H'm! . . . No, can't do that. . . . Because we're going to Florida. Good-bye." He hung up the receiver. "Why the devil don't you keep matches in here?"

CHAPTER XIII

OTHER people looking back upon those days, and even she herself at another time, would recall other aspects of that various and never-to-be-forgotten experience.

But for her, now, it all resolved itself into three or four outstanding happenings—great headlands above an ocean of mist. A mist, golden at first, gradually thickening, darkening to night.

Soon after the Trenholmes' return from Europe, Grandfather Charlton, a hale old pine-tree of a man at eighty-eight, had died an hour after a fall from his horse. Or no; to do the Colonel bare justice, the horse had done the falling.

People who die in Florida are very speedily committed to their sandy bed. Not even his son could reach Florida before Colonel Charlton had been laid in a coffin (made from cedar grown on the place) and buried beside his wife inside the little enclosure "much too near the house," as he had always said.

Grandfather Charlton had telegraphed Camilla on her wedding-day: *Bring him here when you like. This place is to be yours—my ultimate wedding gift. Bless you.*

John Calhoun Charlton.

And now it was hers.

As they drove up the last stretch of gentle incline in the dusk, she felt a great longing to find the leather-brown old man, in his white coat, waiting there beyond the bonfire welcome that blazed outside the enclosure.

"Howdy, Uncle Pax!" she called to the dark figure holding the gate wide. "You're very grand with *two* beacons!"

"One fur each o' yo', Miss C'milla." There was a

fresh reminder of Colonel Charlton in the way the old coloured man touched his hat.

The breeze that seldom forsook the hilltop was still making that sound of surf in the great live oaks. And beyond those moss-hung giants, faint in the dusk, a far-spreading roof over lighted windows. And all the air quickened, exquisite, with the scent of pine. No matter how long she might be away from it, for her this above all places on earth was Home.

Could she make it his home too?

Everything during those next days seemed to hang on that. Even at this distance, the thing which came back first, if not clearest of all, was her unreasoning childish joy in the renewed contacts with early association; her hailing the remembered things with that intense inner glow of revived intimacy—the sense of *having the key* to all this, and her eagerness to give Leroy the key.

It might be difficult, because this dear Florida was the antithesis of the world Leroy knew best. Difficult, moreover, because you had to get him, like a balky horse, *past* the unkempt, neglected-looking outsides of things, to the beauty and delight that lay behind.

He admitted the climate was glorious beyond all telling. "To have within a day and a half of the sleet and slush of New York such air, such sunshine!" He turned up his face the next morning, and drank it in like a bumper of wine.

Another piece of luck was that Leroy approved the horses. "The old boy seems to have known a good piece of horseflesh when he saw it," was his satisfactory if not too respectful reference to the late Colonel's stables.

Oh, those rides in the woods! . . . with Roy laughing, larking, behaving like a boy. "There's something about these Florida woods . . ." Yes, he was understanding.

One after another Camilla's misgivings faded. The most serious of them from the domestic point of view she had already faced in New York.

"Grandfather would never let us, but now we *could* take down our servants. Or get others."

"I thought there were servants there."

"If you didn't mind . . . they aren't like the servants you're accustomed to, and they mayn't be able to do things very properly. But they *are* so nice. And I think they'd feel it if we let other people take care of us."

"Not for the world! We'll have Uncle Pax and Daddy Wash'n'ton," he said, assembling in his prompt way odds and ends he'd heard. "And Aunt Keziah, and Feeble Ann"—he hesitated—"*Must* we have Feeble Ann?"

"Why not? Didn't I tell you her name's really Phœbe Ann, only they thought my mother said Feeble at the christening. So natural of them when they believed the baby was going to die. But Feeble Ann's the strongest of them all. They say she can pick up a sick bullock and carry it back to the shed. But the name goes on. Everything goes on in Florida."

The last of her misgivings fled as she saw how easily and instantly Leroy "took to" these old-time coloured people. Didn't misunderstand their hanging round the kitchen and expecting food, or their helping themselves to fruit and things on the place. If the old ones and all they had belonged once to Colonel Charlton, Colonel Charlton and his superfluity belonged to them and to their kith and kin unto the third and fourth generation.

With the exception of Uncle Pax, who was a person apart, the darkies, big and little, touched in Leroy some chord of humour and irresponsible gaiety that instantly responded. Their hidden melancholy, which the superficial observer so seldom guesses at—that, too, he was quick to divine and sympathize with.

As for Uncle Pax, with his grave good nature and his amiable wisdom, Leroy adored him and his children of all ages and sizes, and his deer hounds ditto. Especially the wonderful Luce, who was a great character, too, in the

Hilltop annals and never far from Paxton's heels. Leroy would come back from a talk down in the barn, or out in the field where they were hoeing, or what not, chuckling with delight over some speech or story that seemed to Camilla the most commonplace thing in the world. "Lord, you can get 'good service' if you've a mind to pay for it—you can't get *that!*"

An odd thing in Camilla's eyes was that Leroy, who was severe enough—in private—upon the waste and shiftlessness about the place, couldn't be induced to share her concern for the ruin of the woods.

"Oh, sympathize a little with the poor trees!" she'd say.

No. People had to have turpentine; to turpentine the pines was to use them.

"It's using them to let them be. That's to use them longest."

He couldn't or he wouldn't see it—not yet. He would in time. Oh, he must! Meanwhile she counted her acres of round timber jealously. If Uncle Pax was along, there were great tree talks. He was the most wonderful woodman in the world. He told stories of saving the trees from the turpentine men, and saving them from fire. You fought forest fires in Florida with sand. He told with his gentle, far-away look, how Miss C'milla she done holp him save a heap o' trees. When she wasn't no mo'n knee high to a woodchuck, if dat chile heah somebuddy been droppin' fire in our woods, she'd come a-flyin' down an' fillin' her dress as full o' sand as she could carry. An' run roun' throwin' it out at de flame."

"Yes, I put out a whole heap o' fires, didn't I?"

"Sho did."

"There's one I saved!" She reined in her horse and looked at what had once been a fine big tree too near the Charlton line to have escaped boxing. So it had caught fire as the boxed tree will. It was deeply scarred and blackened on one side still, and would be to the end of its

time. Yet it soared to heaven and feathered out in green plumes against the sky. "Dear, brave tree!"

"Now *why,*" Roy demanded, "all that for a tree?"

"Oh! well, if you'd seen it flaming, fire eating at its heart . . . But, anyhow, there's a kind of steadfastness about a pine tree. Reassuring, don't you think?"

He couldn't see it yet. How could you expect anybody to have a feeling for pines when he had none for cedars? On that glorious all-day ride with old Mr. Swan for guide, Roy heard, indifferent, the dreadful story of how Florida was robbed of her richest inheritance. "When I was a boy"—Grandfather Charlton's old friend held his bridle high, and looked out across the prairie—"two of the most characteristic things in the Florida landscape were the green and scarlet parrakeets and the cedars"

"What happened to 'em?" Leroy asked absently, stopping his horse at a depression in a low shelving bank.

"What happened? Every fool with a gun took a shot at the birds, and the cedars went through the saw-mills. Man I knew made $150,000 out of cedar, right here in this township. *Now,* in the whole of this great state—and we're a sparse population—there ain't enough cedar to bury us in!"

Whereupon the incorrigible Roy: "Why do you want to be buried in cedar?"

"Why do we *want* . . . !" Mr. Swan gave up this Northerner.

Camilla explained patiently: a white person had to be buried in cedar. At least, that used to be the view. Cedar is supposed to last longer in the ground than any other wood. "Persons of consideration," as Grandfather used to say, "couldn't be buried in anything *but* in cedar."

Grandfather's old friend, somewhat mollified, told, not without significance, of some Northerner coming down here a little while ago and wanting to buy cedar to make

a bookcase. "He was told there wasn't a stick to be had. He knew better. He'd seen some splendid cedar in an old Cracker's barn over by Minden's. Mr. Trenholme wouldn't believe me if I told him how much the Northerner offered those poor people. Think they'd sell? 'Keepin' it for cawfins' was every blessed thing he could get out of 'em."

"Is this one of your abandoned phosphate pits?" Leroy was waiting to ask, still staring at the hollow under the bank.

"This, sir," said the Colonel's friend, "is where they get the stone from."

"Stone? Stone? Thought you didn't have any stone here."

"I don't know any but this," the Floridan said, and he described the true but incredible method of quarrying. When you got a little way below the surface this hard white stone was softer than pinewood. You could saw it! On exposure to air it hardened. Mr. Swan knew a chimney made of it, that had stood for forty years. "As good now as the day it was built."

"What else have they built of it?" Leroy demanded.

"Just the chimney."

"Isn't that like Florida!" Already, in his mind, as Camilla saw, Leroy was turning the stone to account. "Who owns it? Would he sell or lease?"

Riding back with her, bathed in such sunset pomp and splendour as, according to Camilla, only Florida knows, Leroy eagerly developed his scheme for exploiting the Trafford quarry. "All you need to do is to *build something with it* . . . something striking," he said, with his modern sense of the uses of advertisement. "Something everybody'd see and talk about. Then they'd all want to go and do likewise."

"Something everybody could see? That would be a tower on the highest point of Charlton Hill."

"A Sun Tower!" said Leroy, turning round to her

and taking the sunset on his face. "A Temple to the god of this land. A Tower to the Sun!"

Oh, the charm was working! "Look, Roy, at the blue herons." They made a Japanese pattern flying across the greying scarlet. But Roy was absorbed in his Tower.

"We'll start things this winter"—he turned round again in his saddle—"and every year we'll come down here and mal e things hum."

"Hum? . . . Well, anyway we'll come. Oh, we'll come!"

. . . . . .

It was dusk long before they began to climb the hill. "Don't try to see," Camilla urged. "The horses will take us."

They went straighter than men's roads, but it was pitch dark by the time they got home. Also the horses' view of home was naturally the stable. "It's all right," Roy said. "They've had a long day." His own went clattering straight into her stall the moment Roy dismounted.

All that last stretch of the dark woods they had talked about the Sun Tower.

"But we haven't decided about the inside," he said as he lifted her down from her horse. "What shall the inside of your Tower be like?"

"Oh! to have a room, very high up, the highest room in the Tower"—she held her breath and then brought it out: *"lined with cedar.* I should feel like a Princess!"

"You *shall* feel like a Princess. And live in a cedar-lined Sun Tower!" He put his arm round her. They went like that, past the live oak copse, and through the farm gate. But in the moonless dark, Camilla had to lead. She could easily have gone blindfold. "It makes me laugh to think how frightened I used to be of the night . . . *Roy!"* she pressed closer. Out of the velvet blackness two giant eyes glared at them. The worse in that instant for not being at giant's height. Dragon's

eyes, they reared up hardly three feet from the ground.

"God bless my soul! whose automobile's that?" As they neared the house, from out the darkness, Aunt Keziah materialized, near a wedge of light shining from the far window.

"Dat's Misto Sambourne's kyar," she said. They all three stood still a moment. Aunt Keziah was the first to find her tongue. "I reckon dey gwine t'be wantin' some supper?" She wouldn't have formulated anything so obvious in the old days, but folks with autymobills—you never knew where'd they be nex'.

"Oh, yes!" Camilla said, fully wakened from her dream. "I reckon so. Can you manage?"

"Reckon I gotta."

"Reckon *we* gotta too," said Camilla as they went towards the door.

"Hang the Sambournes!" remarked Leroy, himself hanging behind.

"*Darling!*" She went back and pressed his arm.

. . . . . .

As before on lesser provocation, so now again: Why do they come here, she thought. There was all the rest of the world for the Sambournes.

At supper they patronized Florida. Camilla remembered the tone of old. But it had been more guarded in Grandfather's presence.

Unhappily, Roy told them about the tower. How they laughed. Roy told even about the cedar-lined room. "You'll have to get it from Chicago, then," Mr. Sambourne said.

Indeed she wouldn't.

"But you must. The little that's left in Florida all goes north."

What? She'd have to send two thousand miles for cedar grown in Florida swamps and sweetened in Florida sun? "How should I know it was real?"

Leroy joined in the Sambourne laughter, though he

stuck to his promise. He'd get it for her, and it should be the "real Florida article—Pedigree Cedar." But the Sun Tower had grown dark.

The Sambournes talked about Grandfather Charlton. Told anecdotes about him. They must have been good anecdotes, for Roy laughed immoderately. Camilla couldn't say they weren't true, but they didn't represent Grandfather Charlton.

She complained of the stories after the Sambournes had gone. "People who called themselves his friends!!"

"Oh! they weren't ill-natured."

"They were worse. They were disrespectful."

"That's taking a very heavy line," he said.

"Stories like that oughtn't to be told under his roof."

"Look here, Camilla, you really ought to cultivate a little sense of humour."

"Not about that. People who have eaten his bread! . . . They were on their *faces* to Grandfather Charlton."

"Oh, see here—"

"He was a great man!"

At which Roy burst into laughter again.

"*You* didn't know him!" Camilla said with tears. "So I forgive *you*. But the Sambournes—"

. . . . . .

It was after they came, that Florida fell to being a place for cosmopolitans to smile at. Worse than that. The enemy which Camilla had all the while subconsciously dreaded—except perhaps on the peerless day they found the quarry—the unseen enemy breathed a chill into the air. Roy's high spirits faltered. At first intermittently—then altogether gone, except—so strangely to Camilla's sense—except when the Sambournes were there. Or when Leroy and she were at the Sambourne Place. Camilla knew now the full extent of that fear which had lurked in the background—prophetic fear of just what was happening now, hour by hour under her eyes. Leroy made no attempt to conceal it—his face

proclaimed it. A creeping weariness. It culminated after the only rain they had.

"But two days of it, by George!" He gloomed. He slouched. His eyes were dull.

"Are you well, dear?"

"No!" he snapped. "Got the Plague. Or I guess it's the Black Death."

He had been all day like that. Before breakfast she had opened the bathroom door suddenly, and stopped with a stupid "*Oh!*—are you shaving?"

"No, I'm blacking the stove."

For herself, she had always loved the rain. All day now she hated it—actively, passionately. But she didn't feel Leroy's need to frown when the lightning flashed in at the window, nor to fulminate at the assault of the thunder: "*There!* that bolt struck! Near here too." He said this as though it was due somehow to Camilla's carelessness. So she excused herself and the thunder. It hadn't done any harm—just the Florida way of going on.

Towards sunset the weather cleared. She went out on the verandah to watch the clouds roll back. Oh, it would soon be better! As she was going to tell Leroy, a rainbow shone out, spanning a great sweep of clearing sky. One end came out of the clump of palm trees, and the other dropped into the wild plum. It was a thing to take the breath!—for the froth of white blossom was faintly coloured with prismatic violet. Before that miracle, cares and agitations fell away. Over the rain-washed world a mocking-bird was calling. She, too.

"Leroy! the rain's stopped."

"Too late."

But he did presently get up from the sofa where he was lounging, and stroll down towards the wood house. How that sound of the woodman's sure stroke took her back to old days. Uncle Pax was a great man with maul and

"wadge" and ax. Now he practised chiefly in the wood house. Often a little talk with him had been known to enliven Leroy more than anything else down here. Camilla knew the precise moment when he had reached the door. The rhythmic fall of steel on pine had ceased. Now it began again, but with pauses. Leroy and Pax. She went in and brought out a wicker chair. Then another for Leroy. He was a long while. Surely Paxton must have gone to supper. The light was failing with sub-tropic suddenness. There was, truly, a great mournfulness in the Florida gloaming. That sound coming up from the lake! Why had she always this feeling about the frogs? There were far worse things down there in the water. Did the enormously old, grandfather alligator live there still? The lake! That was an idea. She'd get Leroy to take her out one day in the boat. He'd have liked to fish too, if only the Sambournes hadn't laughed the idea out of court. "Charlton Lake! More of a marsh now," was what they said. "The old man" had allowed the water hyacinths to choke it. They admitted he had once upon a time—oh! back in the Dark Ages—stocked Charlton Lake. But the pike, Mr. Sambourne pretended, had with great promptitude devoured the trout. Charlton Lake was like everything else down here, the victim of a tradition of *laissez aller*.

It wasn't true that Charlton Lake was more of a swamp.

Other people went rowing there. Fished there, too. You could see them from the top of the house—and for no reason at all, Camilla suddenly felt that she must cry. It was all the fault of those frogs, tuning up while the dusk was stealing on. She mustn't—she *mustn't* let it come!—the old flooding melancholy, the uncommunicable dread. She sat up very straight and forced herself to mark the curious musicalness of the changes of note and time in the frog chorus. It was silly to think

it the saddest sound in all the world. It was really like sleigh bells at full speed—a shower and shake of small ringing sounds.

Then nearer by, the tiny ping! of night insects striking the wire screens. That meant Keziah was lighting the lamps. Faintly, down by the spring, a whip-poor-will. Then in the opposite direction, something raucous, alien, ugly. The hooter of an automobile! She stood up. Oh, those Sambournes! The car had stopped. Leroy must have heard them coming and gone to meet them.

She went indoors to tell Keziah. She sat down in the kitchen and talked a while. And a while sat silent. Then up and through the latticed way into the house. Yes, they were in the sitting-room. In the act of going forward to give her hand, Camilla stopped. She stood there, staring.

"Well? I've heard a lot," said a humorous drawling voice, "about Southern hospitality. But this is *almost* more than I can bear."

And Camilla was apologizing and shaking hands with Linda. "I wasn't expecting—"

Leroy had laughed. Brisk, full of nonsense and gaiety. When she had pulled herself together Camilla watched him covertly. To all his natural vigour and grace some accession had come. He walked with a lighter foot. Was it because he had an audience? Did everybody, consciously or unconsciously, need an audience? She, Camilla, needed hers. But then hers was Leroy.

It went on for three days—Linda at the Charlton place from morning till night. They all three rode, those two walked, they laughed . . . oh, how they laughed! Camilla's ears ached with it. Her eyes ached. If Leroy went twenty paces from Linda's side, she would throw out a look like a lariat. It lassoed Roy. It brought him to the ground, entangled, helpless—*hers*.

It wasn't to be borne. Ogden Marriott would say it

oughtn't to be borne. But about this, one didn't need advice. One's own heart was counsellor and judge.

Linda must go. Or we must go.

Camilla made up her mind to speak to Leroy that night. After the Sambourne automobile had taken Linda away, Camilla would tell him. Simply that, much as she had wanted to come, far, far more she wanted to go. Why? Because Linda makes me unhappy. We were happy here at first—*weren't* we? It's spoilt now. Let us go.

But that very day saw the initiation of Linda's new phase. She began to take a great deal of trouble with Mrs. Leroy. Stopped the car on her way through the lower wood, and went into bog up to her knees, to gather an armful of yellow jessamine. "I heard you say you liked it." She came downstairs after she had changed her shoes and stockings, thanking profusely "for lending me your things, though they are decidedly small. I've gone about with the idea that *I* had nice feet. Small too . . . but I tried on all your shoes. The sandals just barely save the situation!"

Leroy was waiting for Linda. Yet Linda slipped her arm through Camilla's and carried her off to the north porch.

These attentions embarrassed her hostess.

"I wish you liked me," Linda said plaintively. "I do so need somebody to talk to."

"Don't you talk to Roy?"

Linda blinked and then laughed out. "You *are* quaint! Of course I can and *do* talk to Roy—about lots of things. I can't talk to him about Michael Nancarrow."

And it was Michael Nancarrow about whom, more than anything in the world, Linda longed to talk! She told endless stories about him. They were chiefly hunting stories, but they showed him leading in the field, jumping a stell that no one else dared, and changing horses

without ever touching the ground. She drew high-coloured pictures of Nancarrow's place in the English hierarchy.

"You just ought to see the way those women in Leicestershire run after him. And men like him just as much. There's one trouble," she said, sticking out Camilla's sandals and staring at them gravely, "just one trouble with Michael. He hasn't got any imagination. No Englishman has. He adores me. But he thinks, because I'm married, it's no use."

"And is it?"

"My dear child!" she dropped her sandalled feet and sat up, "of course it is. I hadn't known Michael three days before I wrote to Lu that I wanted a divorce. But Lu doesn't. Refused point blank. So selfish of Lu! Of course I wasn't going to stand being dictated to like that."

Camilla stared. "I should think a husband *might* dictate that another man wasn't to have his wife."

"Mine mayn't!" She stuck out the sandals again, and laughed. "Don't go imagining Lu will break his heart!" And then a freehand sketch of the manner in which young engineers ameliorate existence in the tropics. "Now, *Michael*"—always she went back to Michael. "He's one of those self-contained people—you'd hardly suspect him of being so dreadfully in love."

No, Camilla agreed she hadn't suspected it.

"That's the English way. Terribly afraid of showing their deeper emotions. But I understand him, the darling! Yes, I've started things. Given my lawyer his instructions. And—swear you won't tell—not a word to *any*body—I've got Mrs. Sambourne to invite Michael to pay them a visit."

"Down here?"

"Down here."

"Is he coming?"

"Well, I should just pretty nearly think he *was* com-

ing! Jumped half-way to the moon when he heard *I* was to be here."

"Oh! yes."

"So just do what you can to help me over these days. I don't know how to live till he comes."

The next afternoon, after flirting outrageously with Roy—quarrelling, cajoling setting all his nerves twanging—Linda jumped up, seized Camilla round the waist and waltzed her to the far end of the verandah.

"I'm out of my mind with joy! I had *such* a letter from Michael this morning!"

Another time, when Camilla's equanimity showed signs of wear, Linda displayed a ring. An antique, very beautiful. "It belonged to Michael's grandmother. Wasn't it *sweet* of him to want me to have it?"

And then, the day when Linda didn't come, a boy on horseback brought a note to each of the Trenholmes.

What she said to Leroy, Camilla never knew. The line to her was simply, in enormous letters, two words:

HE'S COME!

CHAPTER XIV

IT was all a blur of vague unhappiness.

No wonder Camilla didn't see Nancarrow clearly. He was just a part of the trouble whose name was Linda.

Even in New York, Leroy had made no secret of the fact that he didn't like the Englishman. But the Englishman didn't know this; or didn't care. Camilla wasn't quite sure which.

Linda played them off, one against the other. Camilla was amazed, as many a woman has been before her, that clever, experienced men of the world didn't see, didn't resent, didn't refuse to play this game. As for Linda, apart from the pleasure she obviously felt in basking in Nancarrow's fascinations, well she knew his use. Now a lure, and now a goad to . . . others.

"Englishmen for me!" She sang his praises till Roy saw red.

The two men were well matched as horsemen. "But which is the better shot?" It was Linda who wanted to know.

They went coon-hunting one moonlight night, and Roy had missed the beggar. The Englishman brought him down. He did it under circumstances admittedly difficult. The darkies talked about the foreign gentleman with awe. "Don't know if the old Colonel himself could have done that." "Lawd! he sho hab got an eye, dat gen'l'man—"

"Well, get an eye yourself; and don't get under my feet, or you'll get walked over some day."

Was it really Leroy who had spoken like that?

Uncle Pax, too, had been full of innocent 'miration. And Leroy actually snubbed Paxton. Now Paxton hadn't been snubbed—that is to say, not by a white per-

son—for a very great many years. Sworn at (by the old Colonel), of course. But not snubbed. His aggrieved bewilderment would have made Roy laugh in another mood.

Word was brought up to the house the next day by a restrained and immensely dignified Paxton, that a gentleman living about twenty miles off had some superfine seasoned cedar which he was willing to sell.

"Oh, don't let us bother about that now," Camilla said hastily.

"Well, I don't know. . . . You might as well have the cedar." Leroy's words seemed to set her adrift in mid-ocean with only a raft of cedar between her and the deep. In spite of her protest, he arranged an excursion for the following day to have a look at this superfine seasoned cedar. They'd take luncheon with them in the motor—the Trenholmes, Linda and her Englishman.

Her Englishman! Incredible, now, to the Camilla who was going to marry Michael, that she could ever have believed for the millionth part of a second that he belonged to Linda.

Linda herself must have begun to doubt if he were her Englishman. Else why that evening, before the cedar hunt, was she playing her last cards so recklessly?

One after another she let hitherto carefully guarded cats out of bags, and never seemed to care.

To a *sotto voce* remonstrance of Leroy's: "Was it *my* fault?" she snapped. "People don't come to me, I suppose, for passports to Florida." To Nancarrow she was abject and rude by turns. Either way, she was miserable, and tried nervously to make amends.

Nancarrow seemed willing to overlook her bad manners, and responded, a little carelessly perhaps, still he did respond to her somewhat crude efforts at reparation. "Oh, it's all right!"

That wasn't enough for Linda. She held out a propitiatory hand, expecting to extort some kindness.

After a moment's hesitation, he took the hand and turned it over with a connoisseur look. "Interesting old ring that is of yours."

Linda, with reviving spirits, looked at Camilla and gave an impudent wink. Then to Nancarrow: "Yes—isn't it? You never saw it before, of course."

"Oh, I'd forgotten. Used you to wear it?"

"No!" she snapped, pulling her hand away. "I couldn't very well wear it before it was given to me."

. . . . . .

The whole business was too bewildering. Camilla walked away and left them. When she got to the gate leading to the Spring Wood, she looked back, and saw Nancarrow strolling that way. He had seen her. It would be rude not to wait.

They went together past thickets of flowering plum down the path—the little track, rather—that sloped gently to the Spring. There, in a hollow of the tangle—moss-hung live oak, wild vine and magnolia—was the roof of the half-hidden Spring House. A dim cool place, crossed suddenly by a flicker of scarlet.

"What's that?" he asked.

A pair of cardinals. "They're always here these days." He called them "a nice kind of visitor," and if Mrs. Trenholme and he were to sit there by the crooked magnolia, mightn't the cardinals come back? His last chance to see them.

She didn't ask what he meant. She had come to a point of not expecting to understand what anybody meant. She sat there under the magnolia, and looked down at the fern-fringed brook and away, through the opening Uncle Pax had cut in the tangle, down to Charlton Lake.

"I shall remember this," he said, "when I've gone away."

She turned slowly. It was too good to be true. "You don't mean—?"

"Yes, I mean I'm going tomorrow, or next day."

She looked at him with hope in her eyes. "And you'll take Linda?"

"Take. . . . Why should I?"

"Oh! I . . . beg your pardon," she said, aghast at her clumsiness. "And I beg hers."

"There's no need to say anything about it," he assured her. "In fact, *I* haven't. Not yet."

"Very well," she assented heavily; and as though he had asked that of her, "I won't speak about it either." As they were going through the gate: "You didn't mean that *Linda* doesn't know?"

"I shall tell her tonight."

. . . . . .

The moment Camilla saw them the next morning: "He's told her!" she said to herself. Leroy, too, must have seen that something had happened. He looked suspiciously from one to the other. Leroy himself was in "one of his moods."

The only happy person of the party, you'd say, was Michael Nancarrow, and if you looked at him closely you might withdraw the exception. There was, however, a genuine exception.

Uncle Pax was brought along ostensibly to pass a woodman's opinion on the cedar. Really because his feelings had been hurt on the raccoon hunt. Camilla had explained and soothed, and brought him along on the box beside the Sambourne chauffeur—with the express permission of the Sambournes, who declined an all-day excursion, but willingly lent the car.

The hours went by, little marked by Camilla. All that she could recall afterwards of the first half of the expedition was, that the cedar which those poor people had hoarded with pious intent, and which they were now pitiably anxious to sell, wasn't worth buying. Of the luncheon hour in the car nothing came back except the fleeting glimpse of an ill-omened gannet.

"Pity we didn't bring a gun!" Roy said, narrowing his eyes.

"You mean," Linda amended, "a pity Mr. Nancarrow didn't." And *that* didn't make things pleasanter.

For once in her life Camilla tried to save a situation. "I tell you what we might do, Roy. After all, I'd *rather* grow cedar than buy it. And this is just the sort of place you'd find a baby cedar in, isn't it, Uncle Pax?"

Heaven be praised, she was out of that horrible car! They all seemed pleased to stretch their legs. They scattered like children out of school.

"Don' y' go too fur, Miss C'milla." Pax came hurrying after her. "Don' y' go down in no holla, Miss C'milla. If y' see a holla, with a gum tree growin' out'n it, and some rubbidge round, doan go near dat."

"No, Uncle Pax, I won't."

"Why shouldn't she?" Leroy stopped to ask.

"Dere's a mighty scairy kind o' cave-place not fur off."

"Oh, yes!" Camilla called back, "that cave Grandfather found."

They asked Pax about it.

"Colonel Charlton, oh yes, he been down inside! De Colonel doan mind where he go." Pax apparently never would be able to speak of the Colonel in the past tense.

"Who else beside the Colonel—?"

"Nobuddy."

"Where is this cave of yours? Come along and show us."

Pax rolled his eyes. "I disremember."

"Oh, come on! Try and think!" Roy and Linda were both at him. "Well, tell us what the Colonel said about it, anyhow."

"Ain't said nothin' much, 'cept dere wus water at de bottom. Yassuh!—a river. Comin' out o' nowhar. An' goin' away unner de worl'." He viewed with anxiety the dispersal of the party bent on search. He made one final effort, hurrying along by the side of Mr.

Lee Roy, as he called him: "Lessen there'd be a war, Mr. Lee Roy, de Colonel doan recommen' nobuddy goin' down, suh."

"Why, if there's a war?"

"De Colonel tol' me, Suh, dere's saltpetre down dere, wuth a heap if we wuz t' git another war."

"We'll get another war all right," Roy said grimly. "You come and help us."

"Here's a funny place!" Linda called out of a hollow, and every one saw by Uncle Pax's face that the Cave was re-discovered.

"You won't be gwine inside, Mr. Lee Roy! We all knowed about dat cave for mo'n forty year. We aint none of us never been nearer'n dis, *in forty year.*" He stopped dead.

Just in front of the party the ground sank, as symmetrically as though the shallow bowl had been hollowed out by man. Long ago, by whatever agency, the depression had been made; for it was not only weed-grown now, but pine trees had come to maturity here, and had paid tribute, like the region all about, to turpentiners, or to lumbermen, or both. Several stumps, charred and split, told that part of the story. On the slope of the basin near the centre, as Paxton had said, a gum tree was growing. Beyond it Linda, stooping down, and now rising to her full height, with excited gesture and exclamation, gathered the others round her in the hollow. She and Roy pulled away the brushwood that was piled under the gum tree in front of a cavity, longer than it was wide, the shape of a gaping, half-open mouth. Or, more exactly, like a gopher hole on a larger scale.

"No trouble about getting in," Roy said. He dropped his legs down, and had nearly disappeared before Uncle Pax came crushing through the brushwood from the other side, and called over the upper lip of the opening: "Wait, Mr. Lee Roy, Suh!—if yo' boun' t' go, wait till I get yo' a flambo."

"A what?" Leroy said, sticking his head out. "Whew! it's hot in here!" And he began to take off his coat. Uncle Pax was feverishly hacking with his great clasp knife at a billet of fat pine.

"Heah, Suh! heah! if yo' boun' t' go. De Colonel say he couldn't a-seen no mo'n a mole widout a flambo." Paxton also produced a match-box. No time wasted (and you could easily waste half-a-dozen matches too) in trying to strike a light on the box. Given the poor quality of match sold to negroes at the Florida country store, you had to proceed to extremes. Uncle Pax, crooking one knee, and with an adroit stroke somewhere in the region of the seat of his trousers, had the match alight and the end of the pointed pine stick flaming, by the time Mr. Lee Roy had thrown out his coat and handed his watch to Camilla.

Flambeau and man disappeared into the earth. Mr. Nancarrow, meanwhile, had been making a torch for himself of the Paxton pattern. And now he took off his coat and followed Leroy.

The two women leaned over and looked down. They could see Nancarrow plainly, bent nearly double and groping his way. Some distance on, was Leroy, bending only his head now, under a roof gradually lifting. Most of Leroy's figure in shadow. One arm, and a white-shirted shoulder, gleamed intensely white.

Linda drew back and stood erect. She fiddled an instant with the buttons of her long coat. The narrow eyes were shining as she said: "I'm going in, too." The next instant the coat was off, and Linda was crouching and sliding through the mouth of the cave, calling as she went in a voice that, near as it was, reached the outside world muffled: "I'm coming! If I slip, what'll happen?"

Nancarrow's answer, barely distinguishable: "We'll all roll to the bottom, I suppose—into the river."

Suppose it were to happen like that! Suppose Roy

never came back. "Give me a flambeau, too, quick! Don't you hear, Paxton?" Camilla looked round and saw him standing a little way off, his fixed eyes lifted, his lips moving. No sound. "It's for Leroy," Camilla said to herself. "Let him pray." She picked up a piece of the fat wood, though she had no match to light it, and kept it in her hand as she let herself down.

Not a sign of Leroy, even when her eyes grew a little used to the dark. Only, a good way on, the Englishman; and Linda bent forward, slipping, sliding, catching him up. Now she clutched his arm. "Mercy! I'm falling!"

But that was quite a mistake. For she kept tight hold of him while she talked, argued, in a whisper. The light flared on her excited face, lifted close to the Englishman's.

The ground was horribly uneven. The loose stones tipped and turned under your feet; they threatened to go rolling along with you. The air was close, the heat intolerable—a horrible place. Camilla's heart failed her. Should she go back? She turned and looked over her shoulder. A dim luminosity up there behind, barely hinted where the exit was. She turned on her heels, still in that crouching posture, and went on down, floundering, clutching at the bigger rocks by the way, though she hated doing this, quite inexpressibly, because of the queer yielding surface. About half an inch or so of a coating of some sort—ugh! It felt damp—curdled.

Leroy! She didn't say the name out loud, but to herself with an obscure panic at her heart—though now, down there to the left, on a lower level, was a glimmer that must be Leroy's torch.

Suddenly something gave way beneath her feet, and by the time she had recovered herself, the glimmer was gone. Nothing now, but the dazzling near-by flare of Nancarrow's light, and, under it, Linda's altered face. Her very voice unnatural-sounding: "Don't, *don't* go.

Why should you?" and her lips almost on Nancarrow's cheek. "It isn't much to ask. Another week. . . . Two days then—"

It was much clearer afterward than at the time. Camilla was hardly conscious of hearing, or of seeing anything this side of the lower blackness which had swallowed. . . . "Leroy!" she called, and ghostly voices took it up. "Leroy! Leroy!" The cave was full of that crying, and of Linda's startled scream, for a stone from under Camilla's foot had gone pelting down.

"It's only me," Camilla gasped as she pitched forward. "I'm sorry . . . I can't see Leroy!" She found herself sitting in that crumbling blackness. Against the hot hand she had thrown out to break her fall, the unpleasant stuff felt clammy. It was like sitting in mouldy curds. She shook it off her hand as she scrambled to her feet.

The light of Nancarrow's torch was in her eyes, and her nostrils were full of pungent smoke.

"What made you come? You must go back," he said.

"Leroy! Where is Leroy?"

"He's all right. We'll go back." He had hold of her arm. And that was well for the intense heat gave one a giddy feeling. She steadied herself with an effort and looked round to take her bearings. Her eye fell on what looked like a gap to the right. It showed black in the disorder of white-faced rock—

"Not that way. Mr. Trenholme's below on a kind of level platform. *Quite* all right. Come, we'll go back." He said it soothingly, as you'd speak to a child.

"Yes, let us get Leroy and go back."

He hesitated a second. "Then take off your jacket and give it to me." He threw it over his arm, and she went on down the black incline with Linda. They could see Leroy now.

"Are you all right?" said Nancarrow's voice a little behind Camilla.

"Yes, he's all right," she answered.

Leroy stood on a projection of rock, his back to the advancing figures, calling Linda to "look!" He flashed his light on the face of the wall. The rude bosses, and the fractures, "faults," showed like white roughcast plaster that had been in an earthquake. But so long ago that it had lost the sharpness of disaster. *"Now!"*—he swung the flare to the right and round over his head, holding it as high as he could. They all looked up. Camilla felt dizziness seize her, for those walls that had been so low over their heads had drawn away from them. The party stood under a rude and ruinous dome.

"See these perfect shells!" Leroy was beckoning. "It's all like some deliberate piece of decoration. Coral, you know. We're in an old sea cave. And mighty near the bed of the ocean."

Well, all Florida was that, the Englishman said, except the Charlton place. A great deal of the state was below sea level. Ticklish state of things.

"Yes, *sir*"—Leroy seemed delighted at the predicament. "Make a hole anywhere here and the whole Gulf of Mexico would come pouring in."

"Look out!" Linda shrieked, and she was backing across the platform. "It's coming! Look! Water!"

It wasn't a moment anybody would forget—that instant when Leroy took his flare in the other hand and swung it to the left to find it flashing light out of the darkness two feet below where they stood. *The shine of water.*

"Well, what of it?" Nancarrow's voice in the sudden silence. "We were *told*—"

"Yes, but like that—at the edge, in the dark." Linda leaned over fascinated.

It wasn't in the dark now. Two torches were held out over the narrow channel. It led away into impenetrable gloom.

Colonel Charlton, all those years ago, or some other, had built a fire on the rock ledge above the water to the

left. Little fragments of burnt wood still lay near a heap of charcoal.

"Maybe the Indians left it," some one suggested.

"Why not prehistoric man? What a place to hide!" Roy said to Linda. "Hey?"

Her eyes gleamed.

The high roof of the main chamber—if it was the main chamber—closed in again over the water channel. A man in a boat couldn't have stood upright.

Linda was labouring still under intense excitement.

"Let me see!" She seized Nancarrow's torch and stepped out on a little projection of rock to peer along the channel.

"Look here! Don't do that." Leroy had taken her by the arm.

"Stop! don't jostle me, or I'll be in. How deep do you suppose it is?" she turned to ask Nancarrow over Roy's shoulder.

"Haven't a motion—have you, Trenholme?"

"Oh, not deep!"

"How do you know?"

"Doesn't know at all," Linda complained. "But I'm not going away till I've found out." She proposed one thing after another. Finally, "Lend me a knife, somebody. And I must have something to sit on. What's that on your arm?" she said to Nancarrow. She smiled maliciously as he answered:

"You can't sit on this—it's Mrs. Trenholme's coat."

"Sit here." Leroy kicked at a flat stone.

"On that filthy rock?"

He pulled out a handkerchief. With his one free hand he spread it over the stone. Linda gathered her skirts and sat down gingerly.

"It's all right." Leroy took a pinch of the grey-black substance from the nearest flat surface. "Say, Milla, did your grandfather own this forty?" he asked suddenly.

She thought not.

"Well, I expect some of us had better get hold of it. Wouldn't be a bit surprised if . . ." He came back to Linda. "Anyhow, it's *clean* dirt."

"Ugh!" said Linda. She was busy doing something to her silk petticoat.

"Yes, really." Roy's face wore that keen expression his father knew and loved. "Looks to me like . . ." he glanced at Nancarrow and shut his mouth with the suddenness of a sprung trap. "I'm only a fake geologist," he began in his bantering tone, "but for a moment . . . What does it look like to *you,* Mrs. Luther Carey?"

"To me? Ugh!" Linda gutturalled her disgust. "Looks like decayed elephant hide to *me.*"

"But that's *exactly* what it's 'like'!" Not his laughter only, but that tribute of the eye said, "Good play—a bull's eye this time!" And then: "Why are you pulling your clothes to pieces?"

"Well, nobody else will think of anything. I suppose I *have* to." She had got it started now. Yards on yards, she ripped and tore the knife-pleated frill off her silk petticoat. "A stone. Somebody find me a little stone." Roy and she tied the stone to the long band of brown silk and Linda lowered it into the water.

Wonderful Linda.

Why couldn't Camilla have thought of that? Camilla had a frill to her petticoat too. It was this kind of on-the-spotness that kept Leroy amused. Linda had turned even such unpromising material as that black stuff on the rocks to brightness, to laughter, and to praise.

Wonderful Linda.

The last of Roy's preoccupation vanished, as he and the wonderful one hung over the water. The plummet struck a projection a couple of feet below the surface. Linda pulled up the dripping silk and swung it further out. "The thing is to get clear of the shelving place."

She whispered something to Roy.

He laughed and guessed not.

She turned round to Nancarrow. "Don't you just *long* to know where this stream goes to—if it goes anywhere?"

Nancarrow's answer was to bend down and launch an envelope on the water. It lay there, becalmed. No current. Wait! It seemed to consider. It half turned about, then very, very slowly it moved along the channel. They watched it in breathless silence, holding the torches farther out to keep it in sight.

"It's gone! Where? Where?" Linda gave a little stamp of excitement. "I never *knew* such unenterprising men. You stand there like posts. Yes, like a couple of posts on fire. If *I* were a man . . ." She looked at Nancarrow. "I thought Englishmen were such splendid explorers."

"Oh, not all Englishmen!" he laughed.

"Do you mean you can't swim?"

"Linda!" Camilla touched her arm. "You wouldn't want anybody to try to—"

She jerked her arm away. "I'd do it myself if I had a bathing suit." She went on reproaching the two men, ridiculing their want of enterprise.

Leroy laughed. "I'd rather like, myself, to see where it goes to."

He hung there an instant, as Nancarrow led the way back up the incline. Camilla glanced over her shoulder. Linda was looking at Roy, saying something too low for Camilla to catch. But dread seized hold of her—dread so potent as to kill all shyness. She slipped between Leroy and that face of Linda's—a face darkling and shining and full of bane, like the black water. Camilla took hold of Roy by the arm: "You wouldn't dream, would you?"

"Why not?" he said, laughing.

"Because I ask you. Don't do it." The pine stick she had been carrying fell to the ground.

"Oh! all right," Leroy said. He picked up the

dropped stick, though he had no need of another. Nancarrow, too, had followed Leroy's plan of economizing flame, now and then, at the price of more smoke. Just when the torches seemed at the last flicker, they would be turned downward again to catch and flame afresh.

With Nancarrow a little way on in front, the three behind, they climbed the first half of the incline in silence. As he passed the place where Camilla had fallen, Nancarrow stopped and held his light towards the little opening that might be a wild beast's lair. Only Linda's narrow eyes followed the exploring light. She whispered something to Roy. He seemed to come out of his abstraction. "What?"

"A stifling hole, this," Nancarrow was saying to Camilla. "I'll be glad of a little air. Won't you?" He helped her at a bad place. "If you'd hang on to me we'd be out of this sooner. Oh . . . you're all right, are you?" He spoke of his plans. Bethune's yacht wasn't due at Tampa for a week. He would go down to Miami and perhaps across to—

"What are they stopping for?"

The voices behind had been growing fainter. Now they were silent.

"I don't much like the feeling of being underground. Do you?" Nancarrow said suddenly.

"No, but—we'd better wait for—the others." She had turned. "Surely they can't be going *back!*"

"I shouldn't think so. Never mind—"

But the glow from Leroy's torch was very certainly growing fainter.

"They want to look at the hole there, on the right. That won't keep them long. Let us get out of this." He took her by the arm. She was being borne up the incline.

"No," she said. "I can't go."

He understood instantly. She felt the hold on her arm relax. A prey to something she knew no name for,

she looked back again. The dim light was going in the opposite direction. A mere point now.

"I wonder if you'd be very kind to me?"

He'd "like to." What did she mean?

"I've dropped my piece of pine—lend me your light."

"What for?"

"I'd like to go back—and *you* go on."

"That I most certainly couldn't do." He talked in a somewhat deliberately cheerful voice as they turned and went down again, and he kept her elbow in his hand, steadying her.

The echoes of his raised voice flew about like birds.

"Hello! you needn't walk over me."

There in the pitchy dark sat Linda on a stone.

"What's happened?"

"Nothing."

"Where is—?"

"He's down there. He's going to call when he's ready."

Camilla didn't wait. Again that choking presentiment of disaster—

In a moment Nancarrow followed her, but Camilla had a good start, and she made the most of it. With quickened senses she recalled the obstacles along the twice travelled way, and fled on like a spirit till that moment's pause beyond the boulder where she stood rooted, saying to herself: "I've gone mad!" For what she seemed to see at the bottom of the cave, was the apparition of a stark naked giant with immense moustachios on fire.

The wink of an eye he stood there, and then, to prove her doubly mad, he wasn't there at all. Where he'd been was nothing—absolutely nothing, if you excepted a strange echoing call, and a glow that wavered on the rock wall. Nancarrow passed running. Linda too flew by. And when Camilla, moving without volition on the plane of nightmare, caught up with them, they were both

standing over the water. And down there, swimming away from along the dark channel—Leroy. He had lighted the torch at each end, and was holding it in his teeth. Linda—one moment shading her eyes, and laughing uncertainly, the next crying out and clapping her hands.

"*Be quiet!*" Camilla said hoarsely.

Linda, astonished, turned her excited face towards the other woman, to be met with: "How *could you*—oh, how could you!"

It wasn't Linda who answered, but Nancarrow:

"It's all right." He rose from a stooping posture with a shoe in his hand. "And if it shouldn't be all right, the one thing I can do is—swim."

CHAPTER XV

HE could never have done what Leroy did. Nancarrow admitted that afterwards. Leroy had swum on till he found the channel closing in. He was in the act of turning back, when, on his right, he saw an opening, which he made for. When he found it to be a dry gallery, he scrambled up the sharply shelving side of the channel. There he blew out one end of his double torch for economy's sake and started off, in a state of nature, to explore. He kept on till his stick had burnt so low, he saw he might soon be left groping in the dark. Not till then did he turn back.

The waiting group had kept on calling to him. From time to time he answered. As soon as they caught sight of him again, Nancarrow handed to Camilla the little that was left of his husbanded torch, and he and Linda went on—Linda looking back and calling out her gay approval.

. . . . . .

Mr. Nancarrow went away the next day.

Did Linda mind dreadfully? Did she mind at all?

The first answer to that question, in Camilla's mind, was "Yes." That was after Linda had burst out in a passionate whisper: "It's your fault!"

"My—!"

"Yes. Why didn't you tell him to stay? You'd much better! And he'd have done it for *you!*" She levelled at Camilla a look so menacing, that after all these years the woman on the *Mauritania* deck shivered a little, remembering it.

With the second answer—an uncompromising "no"—the mystery deepened. For how could Linda "mind"—how could she, in her most perverse mood, believe what

she said about Camilla being in the smallest degree to blame, when all was well between her and Mr. Nancarrow?

She quoted him gaily to Leroy: "Michael says—"

And Leroy's half incredulous, half panic-struck: "Oh, you're corresponding!"

"Well, naturally," she laughed that malicious laugh of hers. "I'm joining him next week."

How was Leroy taking it? Camilla didn't dare lift her eyes. She walked away to the great cactus. While she stood staring down at its curved and saw-edged swords, Linda appeared at her side. Michael had explained, she said, why he went off in that sudden way. "I knew his feeling that until I've got my divorce we mustn't be for ever together. He says 'the strain'—" She broke off with her laugh.

Lies! Camilla thought to herself. But just so she goes, what does it matter why, or to whom?

Camilla's own part, as she saw it, was to "last out" the little time that remained. Only four or five days more would Linda be riding or motoring over; and the Sambournes coming for her and staying to supper. It was a relief now when the Sambournes were there. Camilla need not watch herself so mercilessly. She could retire behind that blur of bewilderment and almost be alone. The second evening after Nancarrow's departure, she came out of her fog to hear the whole party discussing Hillis Sambourne's marital affairs. He was getting a divorce. Though they said it was "too bad," and talked about "the poor children," they didn't seem really to mind. They didn't seem to think anybody else minded particularly. They told one or two stories that made the others laugh.

The talk depressed Camilla quite unaccountably.

When they had gone and Leroy and she were left on the front verandah, she sat for a moment struggling between intellectual shyness and active distaste for the

things that had been said. For some time now she had learned to dread the moments after Linda's going. Leroy made no effort to mask his sense of flatness when all that laughing, audacious talk had fallen silent. He would sit and smoke in a stillness wholly foreign to him, while the "Poor Joe" cried and the frogs chorussed. If Camilla tried to keep up some semblance of conversation, "Yes," "No," or only a yawn from Leroy. And soon: "Let's go in."

Tonight as they sat alone, she let slip some phrase of disgust at one of the stories told about Hillis's ex-wife. "How they all seemed to adore her a little while ago!" She had not expected a response. It surprised her to find that she had hit upon a theme which didn't bore Leroy to discuss with her. First, divorce as it applied to Hillis, and represented as the Happy Solution. Second, divorce in general, as the Saviour of Honesty, the Good Physician of moral and physical health. Divorce the High Priest in the Temple of Civilization—"Society can't go on without it."

She couldn't remember when Leroy had talked so well with only her for audience. His earnestness stirred hers. His eloquence loosened her tongue. They actually argued. Roy went back to Hillis Sambourne and told things he couldn't tell before Hillis's father and stepmother. Very ugly things, Camilla agreed. Roy's cure: "They ought to have gone their several ways years ago."

He sat there talking to her as he hadn't talked for a very long time—with attention, with conviction, with a positive desire to convince her! Why, he cares about what I think! she said to herself with a momentary glow, as he cited this case and that, in illustration of the rationality, the beneficence of divorce, much as Camilla, for Jessica Swazey's benefit, had instanced Aunt Loring and the rest in support of that other ideal, the for ever-and-everness of marriage. Roy produced an aunt, too—his mother's sister, Uncle Granger Sambourne's first wife.

"She hadn't been married a month before she found out it wouldn't do."

"But you know why?" Camilla threw in.

"Yes, yes—found out why Uncle Granger had business in Brooklyn." He laughed.

"—an unmarried woman with a family."

"Granger's surreptitious progeny!" he laughed again. "That there were five of 'em argued, I'm told, for a kind of constancy. Aunt Louise forgave him. Woman's arithmetic! One a disgrace. Five almost legitimatized 'em. She forgave him and they tried to pick it up again. Was it any mortal good?"

"How could it be," she interrupted in her dull tone, "when your uncle went on in a new place in the old way?"

Leroy pulled up a moment, as if the observation she threw across his argument had been a hen or a cat that had got in the way of his automobile. "Who told you that?"

"Your father. He doesn't see how any woman could get on with Mr. Sambourne."

"Well, Aunt Louise couldn't and Aunt Rosamond can. That's my point. Can't say I like Aunt Rosamond, but a more happy and contented woman—bar one—doesn't exist. She suits old Granger too—down to the ground. I can't on my honour, Milla, I can't at the moment recall a happier marriage, except one. And that's Aunt Louise's second venture. She's having the time of her life with her dry-as-dust Italian. It wouldn't, I admit, mean happiness to most people. But there you are—and there *they* are."

Camilla shook her head.

"I tell you I saw 'em!—both of 'em grubbing away at the Laurentian Library, taking ten years between 'em to write a book that would take most people more than ten years to read. *Suits* 'em. See? They're happy."

Camilla stared at the winking fireflies.

"She told me herself," the voice went on, "she'd never known what happiness meant till she married her bookworm."

"I think I'll go to bed," said Camilla.

"Now suppose she'd wasted all that"—Roy was on his feet. He stood between Camilla and the door. "Suppose she'd gone on with her first mistake? Wouldn't four people have missed happiness?"

"Perhaps." She came towards him along the fan of light that shone out of the hall. "Good night, dear."

"Why should people"—he threw out his hands arresting her—"why *should* they go on living together when . . .? Well, *I* call it disgusting!" He gave way. He stood aloof like a man whose fastidiousness is offended.

"They needn't 'live together' the way you're thinking of. They may have to give up their happiness. But they needn't give up everything."

"What do you mean?" he jerked out.

"They"—she spoke in that slow way that had come so to irritate him—"they needn't break faith."

He came towards her a step and stood there on wide-apart legs like a man braced.

"What do you propose they should do?"

"Just the best they can." Still he waited. "Almost anything—so they don't break faith."

" 'Break faith!' " he turned away with an exclamation of contempt. "It's the kind of *cliché* you get by heart. Instead of thinking, of reasoning, of learning anything, you just go on repeating a phrase like that, that's caught your fancy. It doesn't mean *any*thing. You say it as people say on Sunday: 'Lord have mercy upon us, miserable sinners.' You don't think you're a miserable sinner. You think your neighbour is. 'Break faith!' " Again he blew out his breath. "It's got a sound that pleases you, I suppose." If he didn't often take the trouble to talk to her, neither was he often out of temper. She stood there growing colder and more

rigid. A sense of queer helplessness—a sort of paralysis came over her.

He took a turn up the verandah and down. Each time he passed her, standing mute near the base of the triangle of light, he glanced at her as if he meant to say more. And each time he went on with the word unspoken.

. . . . . .

He still left the communicating door open when he went to bed. He would close it when daytime came, and the bad dream dangers were over for one more round of the sun. With a growing oppression on her own heart Camilla lay awake much of that night, listening, almost hoping to hear the labouring breath, the stifled cry, which would give her a reason for going in to him: a reason for looking at his ruffled hair and flushed face—like a child battling with childish terrors and in need of soothing.

But Roy slept sound.

She knocked at the door when she was dressed, and opened it to find him standing by the high-shouldered bureau buttoning his collar at the glass Camilla couldn't see herself in, without straining up on tiptoe. She spoke of the lost dog. He had realized, she said, what losing Luce would mean to Uncle Paxton. And last night one of the cows had been found dead down by the Stillwell prairie. Aunt Keziah had just brought the news. "The body all swoll," she'd said. "That there rattler was havin' a fine ole time. He'd be toppin' off wid one of us humans if nothin' ain't done to warn him."

Roy grinned at the idea of warning the rattlesnake. But a cow! Something had better be done. He would organize a search that very evening.

Evening! He took the matter over lightly. The search might easily fill an entire day and then fail. "I told Keziah you'd see about it this morning, I thought."

"Can't." He had folded the soft collar of the white shirt over the brown cravat and was pulling down the ends before making the slip knot.

"Why can't you?"

"We're going over to . . ." He became absorbed in the knot.

No need to ask who "we" were. She stood with her fingers locked round the brass ball of the bedstead. "Roy, I'll ask you now what I was going to ask you days and days ago. Let us go away from here."

"Go away!" He swung his broad, white-shirted shoulders round as he pulled down the two ends of the knotted tie and fastened them with the clip. There was a kind of pride in his brushed and shining freshness that to her jaded weakness made him seem as inaccessible as the sun. His eyes wore that wide and challenging look he had for strangers.

Her heart was over full for fencing, or for preparation. "I'm too unhappy here, now."

She was amazed, she was cut to the quick, that he didn't ask why she was unhappy. He took it as a matter of course.

"What prevented your saying this 'days and days ago'?"

"Things Linda said."

"What things?"

She shook her head. "They weren't true."

"You wouldn't be happier if you went away. Nor I either. There's no use in mincing matters. You—you haven't the gift of happiness." In the silence she seemed to accept her place with the predestined joyless.

"There are people like that. The best thing they can do," the ruthless voice went on, "is not to spoil the happiness of other people." He waited. Then, as often before, her silence angered him more than any words she could have found. Silence—Camilla learned this only when it was too late—silence gave her an air of superiority which maddened him; an effect of impregnability which he must at any cost beat down, trample on, destroy.

Into the look that he kept for strangers came the look that he kept for enemies. That look *for her!* No word —and what deed could hurt like that? All these years afterwards she shrank before the memory.

"You won't *face* things," he cried before her lowered eyes. And he kept saying that at intervals. "There's a constitutional timidity in you, that hides under 'gentleness,' 'good manners,' all sorts of pretty masks. But what *is* it?"

Camilla had "faced it" at last. She looked at him, wide-eyed. But before that question she could only shake her head.

"Cowardice. That's what it is. I don't blame you." He took his cap and riding-crop from the table. "Largely it's lack of vitality. And when you stand like that and say everything in saying nothing, what's *that*— if it isn't caution?"

"Roy! Roy!" she cried to him.

"Yes"—he said, making a merit of flinging out the first epithet he found ready—"a mean caution."

He seemed stung to exhibit his own immunity from that vice. He said more than he meant to—maybe more than he thought. He didn't care—out with it—anything rather than "this bottling up." Camilla's was "a mean caution," he said, as judged by Linda's mountain-topping audacities. Their explosion cleared the air for you and she, poor girl, suffered from the recoil.

When he reached the door he looked back—still with that "enemy" look . . . but his words seemed to show relenting, even a belated uneasy compunction. "I've often told you you are too self-centred. You ought to make friends. You don't even read any more that I can see. You've *never* thought. You . . . What's the use?" He was running downstairs. Five minutes later voices outside roused her.

Roy was calling to Daddy Wash'n't'n to hurry and open the gate.

When she went down she saw he had gone with no breakfast but a cup of coffee.

. . . . . .

An hour or so before sunset he was back with a party. The automobile had been sent on first, Mr. Sambourne in high spirits, waving a hand and calling out from the gate. The unexpected figure beside him—was that Nancarrow come again?

No; the level rays of coppery sunlight struck sharp gleams out of spectacles. Mr. Marriott! And he was happy, too. He flourished his hat. Everybody happy except—the one who "hadn't the gift." She was first made aware of her own unwelcoming aspect by the quick disappearance of that smiling regard. The eyes through the black-rimmed glasses asked many questions, and one of them was answered before Camilla spoke.

"You don't approve my invading your fastness?"

"Jim brought him down," Mr. Sambourne said, as though that fact must make any one acceptable. "Roy"—he went on as the automobile stopped and the two occupants proceeded to alight—"Roy wanted somebody to come in advance—"

Oh! she understood well, she told herself, that with the memory of those harsh words, those enemy looks between them, Roy would want others to precede him, to relieve the overcharged atmosphere and bring back some semblance of the normal.

What Roy more explicitly wanted was a mount for Mr. Sambourne. Jim was all agog at the notion of a rattlesnake hunt—"quite ready to sacrifice his aged parent." All very well for Jim, on his own hunter. Mr. Sambourne had relinquished his to his wife, and Bonnie, the only other available mount, had been given to Linda. Mr. Sambourne didn't approve of ladies coming on such an expedition—"but you know what Linda is. Our friend Marriott and you, my dear, will keep house till we get back, if we do get back."

"You never ride?" Camilla asked as she led the way indoors.

Marriott waited a moment, fixing her through those bright discs before he answered.

She picked up the admission eagerly: "Sometimes? Then let this be one of the times." She hurried away to order the horses and change into a habit.

Twenty minutes later all seven white people were "ridin' de woods." And Uncle Paxton, on the old bone-shaker he called his, was showing them the short cut to "the Stillwell pa-ra-rie."

Camilla had not been in the saddle a quarter of an hour before the motion, the aromatic air, the level, golden light, had brought her what she sought for.

No "gift for happiness"? What, then, was this?—bruised, uncertain, yet answering the old call of the woods as a hurt child answers the voice of its mother. She breathed deeper of the pine-scented air currents streaming by, she sat the straighter for the straightness of the trees—conscious of that instinctive lift of the heart at sight of the tall stems reflecting the evening light, as though their "gift of happiness" made them smile back at the "good night" of the sun.

Mr. and Mrs. Sambourne halted on the bridle-path this side of the hammock. They looked to rearward through the clear open reaches of the pine-wood, towards their boy and Mrs. Carey—Linda riding slowly for once and compelling Jim to do the same. As for Leroy and Uncle Pax, the hammock had swallowed them. Under the moss-hung live oaks and magnolias, all threaded through and interlaced by wild grape-vine and creepers, Camilla rode with recovered spirits.

"You surely can't go through that tangle!" Marriott called out as she bent low in the saddle.

"*I* can't? 'Bred and bawn in a briar patch,'" she laughed as she rode on. Laughing! There must be some mistake. Or was that evil memory of the morning

the mistake? She had begun to pretend as much before the ride began, from the moment Roy came home, even though he brought Jim and Linda and Mrs. Sambourne. For Roy had jumped off his horse to help his wife to mount. "Wait!" he'd said, and he looked at the girth. He pulled at the buckles just as he used in those first days. His way of saying "Forgive me."

"It's all right," she whispered, as he came close to put the elastic over her boot.

And when, in stopping to gather a spray of jessamine, she dropped her whip—a thing he'd scold her for if they'd been alone—he was off his horse in a trice and gave it back without a word.

But of course. When they were by themselves he could be flinty, sardonic, frightening. But he had never yet failed her before people. These things in her mind, she gave herself no trouble to make conversation with Marriott, as they cantered along the pine-strawed path —finest in all the world for riding. Linda, officiously enough, had said something about letting those two go on. "Mr. Marriott and Mrs. Trenholme will have a great deal to say to each other." That, no doubt, because Linda was in the full tide of a flirtation with Jim. The boy looked excited. His father waited till Jim and Linda came up, and afterward kept on at his son's side. Madam Linda bent over in the saddle to flash an impudent smiling look into the face of the older man, and then gave Bonnie the whip. She rode, now, with Camilla—Marriott behind—till all the copper and the gold went out of the light, and the woods turned as grey as the moss they were hung with. It was out of that greyness Leroy came to meet them. He and Paxton had been to the far side of the hammock—"No luck."

Linda promptly pushed her horse in between Camilla's and Leroy's. "I've been the most horrid marplot! Broke up a *tête-à-tête* between Spectacles and your wife. Ruthless, I am." Camilla stared. But Linda kept on

in her laughing, headlong way, about the great man being quite pitiably bowled over. "At last!"

"He isn't a bit bowled over," Camilla defended Marriott with unwonted energy.

"Bless us and save us! don't say you're bowled over, too!" Leroy doubled with laughter.

"Oh, hush!" Camilla prayed, in misery. "He'll hear."

"It's a shame to tease her," Linda admitted with a patronizing air. "We've all had a lovely ride." She raised her voice as they turned into another bridle-path. "But what I don't like about this expedition is not finding the snake!" She reined in her horse. "Now, *that!* Look, Roy, at that belt of palmetto scrub down there. I should say *that's* the kind of place—"

As if Linda knew! Always Camilla was secretly ruffled at Linda's presuming a knowledge of Florida lore. But Roy agreed it was a likely place. They might go down there tomorrow.

"Why put it off?" demanded Linda.

She is planning to stay with us tonight, Camilla thought, with a sense that she herself was growing very astute. But Linda shouldn't stay. No, I must prevent that.

"There's a moon," Linda insisted.

"Not till late," Roy answered, "or I'd make some of you come back and go on with this after supper."

Paxton at that point suddenly materialized out of the greyness, mumbling, "Nobuddy what knowed 'em ever went huntin' rattlesnakes lessen dere wus a right good light—"

Again it was Linda's voice that drowned the others. "Why, mercy me! what's growing in great black blobs on that tree?"

Every one looked across to the far side of the palmetto belt, where a single gaunt tree stood out like a sentinel. It was stripped clean of bark. Rags of moss hung limp,

forlorn, from boughs that were as bleached as bone. A tree palpably dead, yet bearing an amazing harvest of swollen and coal-black fruits. Uncle Pax drew his breath through his nostrils. "Don't smell nothin', neither," he observed to himself as he turned about and rode down to the palmetto.

Leroy had dropped the reins on his horse's neck. He gripped his gun under his arm and clapped his hands and halloed. The sodden black fruit on the dead tree came alive. But reluctantly. A torpid stir, a spread of wings and a slow, heavy flight.

"There's dead flesh of one sort or another down there," Roy called out, "and a live rattlesnake—maybe a nest of 'em—somewhere in these woods." He was out of the saddle and tethering his horse to a tree while Camilla protested: "*Do* ride. A horse is such a help. *They* know long before we do—" But Roy was gone. Jim Sambourne dismounted too and followed, gun in hand.

Mr. Sambourne reassured the ladies. "The horses would never stand like this if there was a snake anywhere near. And the best of the rattler is, he always gives the kind of warning even a stupid human can understand."

Camilla knew better. But she let the dictum stand, absorbed as she was in watching for the men's caps, which showed now and then, as the wearers moved about in the palmetto scrub. She saw them gather presently round Uncle Paxton's old brown "slouch." Then she knew he had been right about the fate of his dog. By the light of similar scenes Camilla saw, without looking, the swollen, half-devoured body; saw Leroy helping Paxton in the gathering dusk to pile brushwood over poor Luce, and even to drag a fallen tree across so that the branches over the brushwood made an impenetrable network over the pyre.

Linda grew impatient. "Why are they taking all that trouble?"

Too late Camilla regretted that she didn't explain that Uncle Pax couldn't bear to leave what remained of his beloved Luce to the buzzards. He would come back at dawn with a spade and give his friend burial. It was like Roy to understand and lend a helping hand. They had not the smallest need of Linda, but she had ridden down. By straining your eyes you could make out that she sat holding her handkerchief to her nose. That would offend Uncle Pax. She wasn't wanted—had no earthly business there. Even Roy felt that. He was urging her to go on. He raised his voice: "Don't any of you wait. I'll catch you up at the bridge. Say, Milla, let's go with them as far as the bridge."

She suppressed her desire to linger behind the others. She must go on she told herself, riding at Mr. Marriott's side, through the grey wood. She mustn't even look back. Long before they reached the bridge she knew what she would see when she should give herself leave to turn round. Only the three Sambournes. Linda had waited for Roy.

Mrs. Sambourne declared with decision that *she* wasn't going to wait for Linda. Already they were benighted, and all that long ride before them! Mrs. Sambourne arranged with "dear Mr. Marriott" to bring Mrs. Carey with him in the car.

. . . . . .

When Camilla and he had waited at the bridge for over half an hour, they went back to the palmettoes. No human sign.

"You were right," Camilla confessed. "We ought to have gone straight home. That's where they are."

She rode hard so that she need not talk. But however hard she rode, she could not keep from remembering things she wanted to forget. Especially, and over and over with clockwork regularity, that brief interchange with Linda: "It's *your* fault Mr. Nancarrow isn't here now."

"My fault?"

"Yes; why didn't you tell him to stay? *You'd much better!*"

. . . . . .

Uncle Paxton was waiting, invisible in the darkness, at the gate. "Yes'm, dey been home."

They had turned the horses over to the stablemen for half an hour, and then gone off again.

"I don't know 'bout de lady," Paxton said with delicately conveyed suspicion, "but Mr. Lee Roy, he ain't gwine fur, Miss C'milla."

"Why do you think that?"

"Cos Mr. Lee Roy ain't gwine t' wear out one o' de Colonel's best hawses."

"Of course not," she agreed quickly. "They won't be long."

. . . . . .

She and Mr. Marriott sat on the verandah after their belated supper, talking desultorily between pauses that grew longer. In one of these: "Who is that?" she called into the blackness. Marriott had heard no sound. But a voice answered "Me, ma'am."

"Well—any sign of—?"

"No'm."

"You see—" (it was plain that Mrs. Trenholme was leading up to something) "you see, Uncle Pax, Mr. Leroy and the lady they don't either of them know how easy it is to get lost down here."

"No, ma'am."

"And it isn't a night even Florida people would go out in if they didn't have to—is it?"

"Sho ain't'm."

"You've noticed I put a lantern on the top of the house, but what do you say to a bonfire?"

"I wus thinkin' 'bout buildin' a fire myself."

"Well, *do*. And is there anything else, Uncle Pax?"

The appealing note in her voice was not lost on the

sensitive old man. "Why, yes'm," he said with his gentle cheerfulness, "Daddy Wash'n'ton mout go out wid a lantern and holler."

"Could he?"

"Sho kin."

"Then—," Camilla's voice sank, "then let him go towards the lake."

"I got my two boys huntin' down dat a way."

"Then let Daddy go towards the Stillwell prairie."

Marriott asked if there was an extra lantern he could have. Camilla lit it for him. Then, with ears strained and eyes boring into the blackness above the lantern rays, she walked beside him as far as the gate. A few yards below, the bonfire was already ablaze. Several of Uncle Paxton's descendants were bringing up more wood. Orange flames glancing on the dark faces seemed to scour them into brightness. They shone like new copper. Mr. Marriott's figure had almost disappeared among the little bare Black Jack oaks on the right.

"I don't think you'd better go very far," Camilla called. She followed him a few yards. Not till she was well outside the radius of the bonfire light, did she turn in the opposite direction from that taken by Marriott. Cautiously she made her way towards the young pine plantation on the south-east slope. Every now and then she stopped to listen, knowing she would hear by the change in the voices of the bonfire watchers if any one passed them on the way to the house. But the only human sounds were those unmistakable accents of the tenders of the fire—sounds as truly Floridan in Camilla's ears as the whip-poor-will's note or the cry of the "squinch" owl.

All below here, where young pines were springing up, the orange grove had extended, except for that little persimmon patch. Not a sweet orange on the place now. But the persimmons were still here. She felt her way to

the first and sat down in the eye of the distant bonfire. How long she was there, she never knew. Her thoughts ran forward and back, ceaseless shuttles weaving new patterns out of old threads. However she began, always into the design came Linda.

"O God, take her away!" Camilla writhed her hands in supplication as she knelt among the dried broom, scarcely conscious of the sand-spurs, praying: "Take her away. I can't go on bearing this. Take Linda away, or let me die!" Up there in the cloud-piled sky, a gleam shone whitely through the ilex on the brow of the hill. The moon! For a moment she forgot Linda. Oh, blessed moon—that would light Roy home! She rose to her feet and listened. The voices by the bonfire had died. The fire itself burnt low. But the moon would bring him home. She stood a long while there waiting; straining for a human sound. Then, in the rapidly clearing light, she retraced her steps past the embers of the fire. Before she reached the gate Paxton's dogs began to bay—sure sign that no one else had passed. And as she retreated, she saw that the lantern she had set on the housetop hours before, now burning low, was being changed for one that burned bright. That looked as if they hadn't come home yet. But suppose the second lantern was put there for her. By Roy!! She must make sure. And she must do so without herself being seen. Otherwise they—Aunt Keziah and Paxton, Mr. Marriott too—they'd prevent her coming out again. Or they'd come with her, which would be unbearable. She went the long way round to the north gate, by the Spring wood, and came softly up by the back of the house. From behind seedling sour orange she saw Mr. Marriott talking with Paxton in the hall. Both had lanterns. She retraced her steps in swift silence, and hurried down the hill again.

Roy was lost. And the moon riding high made the bare difference that he would try, and try again, to find

his way, only to wander further afield. For even to the Southernborn, moonlight here transforms the world. This was the stranger because Florida moonlight is clearer than that of other climes. More like some strong artificial light. It made shadows as sharp-edged as any the sun could cast. It reproduced leaf and twig tracery on the white sand, clean and clear as etching. Her own shadow moved like a tangible companion, now incredibly lengthened, now telescoped back to less than human stature.

And in spite of, or because of, the growing power of the moon, things of earth most familiar by day wore a look alien, mysterious. This little fringe of hammock you must cross before you reach the pine-woods, these post oaks and Black-Jacks, slight, short-branched, crowded together and moss-hung—dropping earthward each and every one its rags and tatters of grey filament —made an impression by moonlight you never got by day. Camilla turned and looked round. The sudden sweep of the eye identified the vertical lines made by the hanging moss, as a wood all streaked and steaming—a world in tears. Or as if the beholder saw but mistily, through weeping eyes—eyes that greyed and filmed the world. She began to run—one must get away from the weeping wood to the dear, brave pines. When she got down there, she would call and Roy would hear her. As she hurried on, at a break among the little trees, appeared an open space which she couldn't remember at all—white sand taking the moonlight so strongly that at first it looked like water; and, across the silver field, one great bar of shadow.

"What is it, Roy?" she called, and stood quite still. "Roy?" The faint twitter and pipe of night voices paused an instant, and that was all. They began again. She, too, went forward to find a giant pine fallen across the field of silver. And yet, not fallen either. Riven. The splintered base said: lightning. That thun-

der-bolt during the storm the day Linda came! Camilla walked from the spreading base of the bole along the mighty length to where the great branches spread, flung out like arms that had appealed in vain. How proudly they had hailed the skies, held up their green plumes to the rain, worn the stars for a fillet and the sunset for a mantle. Now it lay with its crown in the dust. What a fall was there! Like Camilla's, when from the height of her happiness she had tumbled out of the Sun Tower to find Linda at her door. She lay down now on the prostrate tree and pressed her cheek to the bark. "O God, take her away; or else—take me!" She rose up and went on through the black and silver wood, praying ceaselessly that self-same prayer—till far off she heard halloo-ing. She knew it at once for a negro voice. "O-*o*, Mr. *Lee* Roy! O-*o*!" And far off on the other side of the wood: "O-*o*, Mr. *Lee* Roy! O-*o*!" The searchers stopped and listened—so did she—for the answering voice. None came.

As she went on she realized that all along in the back of her head she had been fearing that Roy had succeeded in finding the rattlesnake—rather that the snake had found him. Roy and the mottled monster of the South! To get rid of the picture she began to run. But the picture only changed as though she had merely turned the handle of some new kind of stereopticon. The rattlesnake was having it all his own way. For Linda didn't know the least about this gliding horror that went about the woods—Linda, as ever, laughing and engrossing every sense of the man she walked with. That precious, most protective power, his hearing!—Linda's laughter filled up the cup of his ear. His keen sight!—it was straining in the ghostly light to catch the changes on her face. His very sense of direction, dulled or lost. He'd be guiding Linda's footsteps, holding back branch and briar from her face—so that even his sense of touch —all, all Linda's servants!

And the roaming horror waited for its chance.

Camilla stood still in the black and silver woods listening. Not a sound. Not so much as a dry leaf rustling. But the eye was always finding a serpent in the shadow. Any round stick served. Little and big, on every side, they swarmed as in an alcoholic vision. Yet these phantasies alone lacked the horror lent by the addition of Roy to the scene; by the image of their stealthy advance on a Roy unaware. Again and again Camilla saw the thing happening as she'd seen it once when a child. Eight, ten, twelve feet long at most, but endless-seeming. A miracle of motion among fallen leaves, wearing all the leaf shades in flecks upon his back, except where the great black diamonds were stamped with the precision of a die. The paralyzing quickness of that progress! Her old impression came back as vivid as present vision. The great serpent *flowed* along the forest floor—yes, as if he'd been some swiftest runnel of sunflecked water—flowed past the rooted child, flowed on till he met the obstacle. Uncle Pax. The whites of Paxton's eyes shining, his lips drawn back, his bared teeth shining, horror on his face and hate and terror, till the human face was more unnerving than the rattlesnake. In Paxton's upraised hands a fence rail falling like a flail upon all that writhing and rattling. And Camilla crying out: "Don't! *don't* beat him any more!" And Paxton going on with a kind of horrible glee as if he couldn't stop.

And when at last the miracle of motion was battered into stillness, and Paxton could think about the child, he told her how he'd seen the rattler coiled round a young heifer, crushing it to death. That picture was replaced tonight by one of Roy and Linda. Drawn close together, squeezed to death, in a scaly embrace.

. . . . . .

Calling and crying Camilla went through the woods —north, south, east, west—hour after hour. A little before dawn a deer horn sounded. Her first thought was:

old Mr. Swan out with the hounds! Then she remembered the calendar. Why should a deer horn be blowing this late in the year? Was it a signal that Roy was home and asking "Where's Camilla?" Paxton would say "She'll sho heah de deeh hawn." But Roy wouldn't be able to blow it. To do that is an art. Paxton must have done it. There it was again! She tried to run, and found she could as easily fly. Very slowly she made her way home—though she could see Roy now, anxious, restless, sending down to all the little grey wooden houses in the negro settlement, to rout out men and mount them upon horses to scour the country. What a foolish game Roy and she were playing!—she hunting him and lighting lanterns for him; he sending out search parties for her and sounding the far-heard horn. I'm sorry, Roy to be so "lost" and to be so slow getting myself found. She saw herself arriving. "Where in thunder have you been?" she could hear him. And if he'd been very anxious he would swear. "Didn't you hear the horn? Why didn't you come quicker?" And she'd have to explain. "I can't seem to make my legs go any more." Several times she had to stop and rest. She heartened herself and went on, thinking, "I need only get as far as the gate. He'll come running out and he'll be furious. Then, when he sees how hard it is for me to walk, he'll pick me up in his arms and carry me into the house."

But we never seem to get these forecastings right. It was Ogden Marriott, watching the sunrise from the housetop, who saw Camilla toiling up the hill and hurried down to meet her. So Roy hadn't got home! Camilla leaned against the gate. What dread news Mr. Marriott waited up to tell? She tried to call to him. All she could do was to stretch out her hands.

"He's found!" Marriott sent the words to meet her.

She stood quite still. "And is he—all right?"

"Oh, absolutely!" Marriott hastened forward and took her arm.

"Where is he then?"

"I'll tell you how we found them," Marriott said in a soothing, everyday voice. "We came—Paxton and I—less than an hour ago we came to a magnolia down near the Stillwell prairie. A magnolia with a low, crooked bough bending out like this. And over the bough, a huge rattlesnake hung—dead. I called out to Paxton, and Mr. Trenholme answered me."

"Linda—"

"Oh, she's—she's all right too."

. . . . . .

They were standing by the cornerwise fire in the sitting room, Linda very lovely. Her weariness had softened her. Leroy too. They had a curious quality in common. Neither seemed quite to see the people who had been searching for them all night long. One glance from Linda, one moment of half-amused wonder, as she asked her extraordinary question: "How have you two got on?" And then that light, intangible veil seemed to drop down and shut out the sight of Marriott and Camilla and all the world. Breakfast? Linda needed sleep, she said, more than anything. If somebody would be an angel and send her up something on a tray—

. . . . . .

It was natural enough.

Camilla hadn't had an encounter with a rattlesnake, but even she felt shaken, ill. "You won't mind, Roy, if I breakfast in my room too?"

He looked through her as he murmured: "All right, all right!"

CHAPTER XVI

WITH her old faculty for sleeping, Camilla never stirred at the luncheon bell. She lay across the bed like a creature felled by a blow, unstirring, unseeing, unhearing. Like that till near sunset.

Keziah came in with some tea. She sat there while Camilla drank it. "What's been happening, Aunt Keziah?"

"De gen'l'man done gohne 'bout his business. De lady say she too wo' out to ride hawseback. Dey gotta sen' de autymobill fur her. So de gen'l'man he gwine to tell 'em." Aunt Keziah gave a sniff. "Mr. Lee Roy, he done sont Will Cyarter to show de gen'l'man de way back to Sambournes'."

Camilla nibbled toast.

She was about to ask where was Mr. Leroy when a trilling sound came up from the verandah—Linda laughing. Keziah sat with her unwinking, animal-like eyes on Camilla's face. They seemed to ask a question. Camilla looked away.

"Dey done skin dat snake," Keziah observed.

"You don't mean Mrs. Carey—?"

"No. *She* gwine to hab slippers made out'n de skin."

"Oh?"

"An' a belt.

"Is she?"

"An' a bag."

"Oh, really."

"Yaas'm. Sho' is!" She nodded her head.

Again Linda's laugh—louder this time, too loud. The beauty of it coarsened. It was the laugh that Roy encouraged with his stories. Was it one of those stories he seemed not to relish quite so much when they were told before his wife? even though, when he had Camilla alone—

That was different. He no longer expected her to laugh. (Did he get his amusement out of her bewilder-

ment, her incredulity?) Anyway, in company you played for laughter—and Linda's was infectious. Perhaps even more infectious when in Camilla's ear it sounded a note too unrestrained. She remembered her old be-puzzlement over the fact that Linda didn't offend Roy's sensibilities. Linda was frankly common at times. "Gamine" Roy called it, and laughed at remembered drolleries. He wouldn't, Camilla thought, comforting her heart, he wouldn't like his *wife* to be like that.

There had been a conversation about Uncle Sambourne's "affairs" with ladies. Camilla heard only a little, because Roy cut it short when she appeared.

And how intensely that had bored Linda.

Did it also—she asked herself for the first time—did it also, in the long run, a little bore Roy? . . . this need to consider what he once had called "the incorrigibly schoolgirl point of view." Was that partly the reason—?

He was too nice to be able easily to disregard her feeling about these things—yet, did it irk him to do as he felt he must do?

Was *that* it?

Could it be changed? Could she—(to instance an extreme case, for of course it wasn't anything like the unspeakable Balzac story that Roy would dream of telling Linda)—*could* Camilla go on reading that volume he had given her more than a year ago and which she had put down with a sensation of nausea?

While she dressed—the rich Linda laugh sounding in her ears—she solemnly debated with herself whether she could learn to see only the humour in the *Contes Drolatiques.*

"Dat lady gwine to stay fur supper?"

Camilla started. She had forgotten the still, black figure with the animal-like eyes.

"I'll let you know presently. I'm going down to see."

She made Keziah wait till she had dressed. The sun had gone down and greyness was gaining on the last of

daylight when Camilla with the old woman descended the back stairs. "You ought to have gone and lit the lamps, Keziah." Ann wasn't allowed to touch the lamps, and Roy was always annoyed if they weren't burning bright before the dusk came on.

"Lawdy me, I ain't *filled* 'em! Don't know what 'tis 'bout this day. . . . Been feelin' sort o' discombobberated." Keziah stopped in the lower passage, clanking oil cans and busying herself about the lamps. Camilla on her way through the dining-room stopped. A wholly irrational shyness had descended on her. She turned back. "You can hardly see to do that without the lantern."

"Yes, I kin," said the old woman. "Won't spill nary a drop if nobody comes talkin' to me."

Camilla smiled, and went on through to the kitchen. Nobody there. It was the hour of peace, before the supper preparations, the time when Feeble Ann went down to visit her coloured friends, and Aunt Keziah, after the lamp lighting was seen to, would go out and seat herself on the little porch outside the farther door—and light her pipe. There was a theory that the fumes never got as far as the kitchen, let alone into the house.

Camilla came down the deserted little back porch and turned slow steps towards the verandah, meaning to walk round to the front. She found herself wrestling still with this unaccountable shrinking from joining the others—a shyness such as might daunt a child who has run away from home and now, returning, wonders how she will be received. It seemed a very long time since she had seen Leroy. No doubt he had been up more than once to find out how she was, and had scoffed inwardly at her "talent for sleep."

Without going round to see, she could tell they weren't laughing any more out there on the front verandah. They had gone off for a stroll perhaps. An immense relief came over her. By the time they could get back the lamps would be lit and the fire—had the fire been

neglected, too? Instead of pursuing her way round to the front steps, she went briskly to the verandah, took with a spring the high climb up, and looked in through the open window. Fire—yes. Its subdued glow was on Roy's face as he sat in the corner of the sofa opposite the chimney-piece, his profile to the window. Linda, standing very long and straight in her crumpled linen habit, was in the act of turning sharply from the fire. She stood over him: "If you say 'Patience' to me again, I'll grind your ears."

A stupid wonder as to what Linda could mean—that, as much as anything, held the woman at the window, silent, staring—while Leroy glanced at the door and laughed in a restrained, hushed fashion utterly alien to him.

"Or if you *look* 'Patience' like that, I'll do it." And then and there she carried out her threat.

The very strangest performance. Grotesque to the verge of lunacy—unmeaning except for its implication of justified daring: of intimacy, of . . . of *what*, in God's name!

She had bent over, Roy dodging and pretending to fight her off, and Linda getting hold of him by the ears. Then he seemed to abandon resistance, though he kept up his low, half-laughing remonstrance. Linda brought her face nearer—eyes narrowing, set teeth gleaming. As she put on that look of ferocity she began the "grinding"—less a grinding than as if the ears were on screws and she would wind them in closer to the head, round and round on supple wrists she turned her hands.

"Stop it, I tell you!" He seized her arms, but she refused to let go till, as suddenly as it came, her tigress mood flashed out. It was gone. Slowly she lowered her face and kissed him on the eyes. At the sound of a motor on the lower road she raised her head.

Camilla turned sharply about and jumped off the verandah. She fled through the dusk down to the shelter of the Spring wood.

She stayed there till she heard the motor drive down the hill.

When Camilla came in, Leroy was opening the newspapers that had lain for days neglected on the table. The fire had been made up. The lamps were lit.

"Oh, there you are!" he said.

"Yes." After a pause she added: "I was here before."

"When?"

"About half an hour ago."

"Why didn't you come in?"

"I couldn't. I was at the window there."

He crushed the newspaper wrapper in a ball, and let it fall on the table.

"Roy—?"

"Yes."

"I . . . I saw."

He gave her a quick look, and then sat down. "Well, I suppose it had to come."

"What had to come?"

He didn't answer.

"You oughtn't to have let her, Roy."

"Let her . . . what?"

Must she say? Yes; he wasn't going to spare her anything. She drew her breath as if a knife edge had caught her, before she spoke: "You oughtn't to have let her kiss you."

"Oh! . . . a . . . well . . . I can't blame it altogether on Linda."

"No, it wouldn't be like you to *want* to lay the blame on a woman. But of course I know it was her doing."

"Her—?"

"*Yes,*" Camilla struck in sharply, "*all her doing.*"

"Look here, it wasn't."

"You try to shield her! But to *me*—no, you shouldn't try to shield her from me."

"I'm *not* trying to shield her. I'm telling you the truth—" He broke off suddenly—in the full tide of

telling her "the truth" something stopped him. He sat looking at the fire—not ashamed, not sorry, a strange triumph in his face. Even now, with her so near, so torn, it didn't seem to be of her that he was thinking at all. His eyes, his beautiful absent eyes, had shut her out from some inner vison that enthralled him.

"Roy . . . " she began, and each low-proffered word had to be plucked out of her heart with red-hot pincers—"when you and she got lost in the woods—"

"We *weren't* lost!" he struck in on a note of defiant joy. "Last night was the night we found each other."

She stood in stark bewilderment. She opened her lips and no sound came. She shook her head faintly, in that way she had, and suddenly sat down near the fire. "I dare say I *am* pretty dull. . . ." She lifted her eyes in the pause. "What is it you were just now trying to tell me?"

"God bless my soul!"—he sprang up and walked from fire to window and back again—"I've been trying to tell you for six mortal months! I *have* told you, only you won't take it in!"

"Let me see if—" she lifted one hand—"if I can get it clear. I saw Linda"—her eyes dropped—"kiss you. You say, it wasn't her fault." She looked at him as though under some strong compulsion. "That's chivalry, perhaps."

He made a gesture of despair, half humorous, half wrathful.

"But you say," she went on, still like a child spelling out a lesson, "you and she weren't really lost though you stayed out together the whole night long. But—" a slight shiver passed over her—"you can't mean—"

"But I *can*—" he stopped suddenly in front of the fire—"I *do* mean—"

She bent forward: "Everything?"

He nodded.

"You mean the worst that these gossips have been saying?"

He accepted it almost with relief. "The worst. Or" —with a gleam of bright defiance—"or the best."

"Why, Roy—" she could hardly shape words for the quivering in her lips—"then it must be that you don't love me any more."

He tried to speak and suddenly, as if to his own astonishment, his eyes filled. He half turned away. He mumbled. She wouldn't really mind, once she got used to the idea. But for the moment . . . it was damned unpleasant. It hurt. He wiped his eyes.

Her hands slipped off her lap, and hung at her sides. "It's the end of the world," she said.

"Oh, come! It isn't anything of the kind."

"Yes, for me it is the end of the world."

. . . . . .

She came north the next day and Leroy went to his horses in Kentucky. Where Linda was, Camilla didn't know. Months of such dull anguish followed as made the actual legal process of divorce a bearable matter, almost relief.

She had been married four years. She was twenty-two. And life was over.

. . . . . .

She and her father were together all that next year. Then she went abroad with her sister Julia. They lived in Paris—and that was a story by itself. And then she lived a while in Florence—another story. And then, just as she was coming home to him for good, her father died.

He left her a great deal of money and a life stripped of its last close tie.

Then London and Nancarrow.

Michael.

For sudden tears she couldn't see the wide Atlantic, nor the people on the deck. But she could see *him*.

"Oh, Michael, Michael! I'm getting it all clear. I see you as I couldn't see you before—"

Dear Michael!

CHAPTER XVII

IT was curious—it was infinitely sad not to be met.

She found herself going back again and again to the question whether Leroy—and Linda of course—whether they were in New York. "What does it matter?" she admonished herself. And then all over again—"Are they here?"

She shook off the inevitable steamer acquaintances. As soon as the inspector permitted she left her maid to see to the baggage, and drove to the Ritz. The loneliness of this city she had once called home, took her back to that first night of anguish at Miss Holroyd's. And now there might be worse than loneliness to fear. In a fit of old shyness, she yielded to her shrinking from a possible meeting at the hotel with some acquaintance of hers. Or worse, of his! She dined in her own suite.

Michael.

She had already posted the letter written on the ship, and she had sent him a cable from the wharf.

"Arrived safe. Love from Camilla."

She would write and tell Michael how she was missing him. When she had written a page she suddenly put her face down on her arm. She couldn't bear this longing and the slow pace of mail steamers. She tore the letter into little pieces. Tomorrow she would cable him to come.

That first morning she was wakened by her maid's coming in with a letter cable from Michael, an answer to the one she had sent him by the pilot boat before landing. As she read, she could hear his beautiful voice. She could feel his hand. In return, all her love and gratitude she cabled in a single word: *Come.*

And New York was no more the saddest city under the sun.

The newspapers announced her arrival. Several re-

porters tried to see her. The telephone in her sitting-room began to ring early and never stopped.

Among the first voices, her brother-in-law's. Julia was in California, but wouldn't Camilla make the house her headquarters? What—*Florida!* When? Oh, thin clothes . . . well, she must lunch with him and he'd tell her the family news.

Tina Lenox next, speaking from the old Sambourne house. Yes, she and Robert were there to look after things while mother and father were away. Josephine, the oldest child, wasn't very well, and Tina didn't like to leave her—Camilla must come and dine that very night.

But that wasn't possible. Mr. Ogden Marriott had sent up a note to ask Mrs. Trenholme to dine with him, and she had accepted. Lunch then? She was to lunch with James Atherley, but she'd come to Tina between four and five.

She found Mrs. Lenox in one of the cheerfullest nurseries she had ever seen, with three of the cheerfullest small children. "The papers," Tina began, "told us you were going to be married right away—"

"Not right away," Camilla answered calmly, "but soon." The dear Charlton place had been dreadfully neglected. She wanted to do certain things to it before she showed it to Michael.

The really important topic was Tina's three children. Tina talked about them for half an hour before the little pause in which she said: "I suppose you haven't run across Leroy yet?"

"Oh no."

"You knew he was in New York."

"Not till James Atherley told me."

Tina looked at her, waiting for questions. In default of these—"Then I suppose James told you—"

"Almost nothing. We had other things—" She took the baby in her arms. Nobody could expect Tina not to follow that lead.

A maid coming in to turn on the light and draw the curtains, brought Tina back to the lesser affairs of life. "In these last weeks we've been seeing a good deal of—" one blind was proving bad-tempered. "Leave it to me," Tina said, and then as the maid left the room: "In these last weeks we've been seeing a good deal of— Oh, there he is now." She stared down sideways into the street below.

Something indefinable supplied the name. "You don't mean—"

"Yes, Leroy."

Camilla stood with the baby hugged against her while she heard that Bob was building a house for Roy and Linda on Long Island. Not that Linda showed much interest in it—but Leroy had got into the habit of dropping in to look over plans and talk about his new hobby.

"I suppose," said Camilla, holding on to the baby as to a friend in need, "I suppose he doesn't come up here?"

"No. And I suppose"—Tina smiled—"you wouldn't come down?"

"Come down!"

"After all, you *have* seen him—since."

Camilla murmured "Consulate, business," as she bent her head and touched her cheek to the down on the baby's head.

"Oh, very well! I'll just go and tell him Robert will be a quarter of an hour late."

Camilla was to have the privilege of staying with the children till the nurse came back. She watched Tina cross the hall, to her own room, to do her hair. Even Tina wanted to look her best for Leroy. As for Camilla, her knees were shaking. She laid the baby carefully in his cot. Her hands shook as she held up a rubber doll. The voices with which she commended the toy to the baby's good graces—that shook, too. It was strange that she should be like this, just because—Linda's hus-

band was downstairs. Here was the nurse, and Tina had gone—. That voice!

She stood at the door buttoning her glove—straining towards those accents. Were they less buoyant, a trifle flatter than of old? James Atherley had got as far as: "Leroy's marital difficulties don't seem to be over" and something about Leroy "being hit hard," before Camilla had stopped him. Why had she stopped him? She wished, now, she hadn't. It was worrying to be in the dark. For nobody would realize she was in the dark. They'd go on the assumption that, whatever was generally known, she would be sure to know it.

Was he really "hard hit"? She kept repeating "hard hit" as she buttoned the long glove. It didn't sound like Leroy's rôle, being hard hit. How did he take it? Did he ever regret? Had being hard hit changed him?

Suddenly she remembered that unglazed window looking into the double parlours from the hall behind the back room. Before she had formulated to herself the vantage ground it presented to one ostensibly on her way to the front door by the back staircase, Camilla's feet had carried her down and halted her behind the heavy hangings.

There!—under the strong light thrown from the central cluster in the front room—there he was! She shrank back further behind the folds of silk. Only one eye, through the heavy falling fringes, took in the unconscious figure sitting there with his legs crossed in the old way, his shoulders squared, his head up—all the same, the same!

Quite the same?

Her hand trembled as she turned up her veil. The queer feeling grew that the more steadily she looked the less clear she saw him. It was as if a film lay over the remembered brightness. Impossible to say that anything definite had happened. He was the *bel homme* still. The mouth tighter-lipped, the eyes as shining as ever, a

trifle too challenging still. When, then, precisely *was* the subtle, all pervading difference? Was it—could it be that he wasn't happy?

She was stirred. She was glad. She was sorry. Most of all she was struck by the stark incongruity of a Roy who wasn't getting what he wanted out of the world.

She stood there straining to read in the familiar, unfamiliar, face traces of what these six years had brought him. Whatever it was, it bore no scar of shock, no definable confession of the sharper suffering. Whatever it was, had come slowly, had crept upon him. She knew now that the dawning of this portent had vaguely troubled her during that palpitating five minutes at the Consulate four years before. But Camilla was a person who went blind sometimes under stress of feeling, and she had been more shaken with dreads and longings—with shames and wondering—during that meeting before strangers with Linda's husband, than ever in her life before or since.

She had not only gone blind. She blessed her blindness. She had hugged it like a shield.

"You aren't looking at me," he had said to her aside.

"I have to look at the deed," she answered. "Is this where I sign?"

Now she could look, and look, at the stamp of the deed on his face.

Tina said something that made him smile. His shoulders went up as he thrust his hands in his pockets. He slipped down further in his chair. To the watcher in the hall this new tendency to lounge masqueraded for a moment as weariness of spirit. And then she found herself realizing that it had more to do with a body just a trifle out of condition. That slight thickening of the neck extended to all the figure, and to every feature except the mouth. Yes, there was about Leroy Trenholme today a faint—the very faintest suggestion of middle age. It didn't pretend to have arrived. Merely the impu-

dent hint: "I'm coming—and this is the way I'll come."

A sense of sharp discomfort stabbed at the woman. Not that she cared about Leroy in the old way the very least, she told herself; but this treachery of the years offended her sense of fitness. Leroy was only—yes, he was thirty-six.

Tina got up. "Bob left the plan of the conservatories here." She brought a portfolio and laid it on a small table. He turned his head and bent over with a quickness that threw into bolder relief the heavy-weighted look of the rest of the body. The action, with its accomplice the overhead light, offered yet another betrayal. Down on his unsheltered crown the strong light fell. It showed a disc of pink scalp through thinning hair.

Roy—Roy! growing bald! A sense of the outrageousness of the catastrophe seized her—a sense that it wasn't to be endured. She couldn't have Roy bald.

She couldn't? What business was it of hers? It was . . . Yes, it was Linda's business. Why then, wasn't Linda attending to it? What was Linda thinking about to let Roy's hair go like that?

Linda, who only kept her own light auburn fuzz on her head by constant attention—washes, pomades, hair-drill, what not. "A selfish creature!" (Camilla said to herself as though perceiving the fact in its fulness, now, for the first time). "So absorbed in her own looks she doesn't pay proper attention to Roy's. Plainly he must be made to do something."

If he had risen and come towards Camilla at that moment, she would almost certainly have said: "The very best lotion, I'm told, is eau de—"

He was on his feet! His voice rang out: "You don't say she's *here!* Where? Upstairs? Oh, tell her I'm—"

"She knows."

"And you mean—"

"Well, *I* can't make her come down."

"Then *I* will."

Camilla shut her eyes and clung to the curtain. Was he running up the stairs? She looked into the room. Tina sat alone. Camilla opened and shut the front door noiselessly, and sped back to her hotel.

. . . . . .

As she dressed for dinner, she found herself fervently blessing the chance that had brought Ogden Marriott across her path again. It was that man's mission in life, apparently, to come in at critical moments. Why was she calling this a critical moment? After all, everything—for her—was settled and sure. As for poor Leroy—well, that wasn't her concern. All the same she was thankful for Ogden Marriott. But for him—that face!

It wasn't left for Mr. Marriott. The act of exorcism was performed by Michael, in the shape of a cable:

"Sailing day after tomorrow. All my love, Michael."

She tucked the precious paper in her dress and went into the sitting-room, smiling, to meet the Looker-On.

Over the *hors d'œuvres* at Sherry's: "Tell me about Mr. Nancarrow," he said.

Under the kind eyes she was able to do that. And though, even upon the theme of themes she hadn't really been able to say very much—mainly little half phrases, ineffectual enough except as luminously interpreted by the Looker-On—she had felt as if she could go on for ever. Just to sound those syllables that made up his name brought a glow of happiness about her. No chance for changed faces to intrude. "Mr. Nancarrow"—"Michael"—and with that a magical safety.

. . . . . .

In the helplessness of sleep, unable to weave spells with the name of Nancarrow, that other face came back. She woke confronting it. She lay trying to identify, and to account for the change. What had happened? Camilla

had stopped each one in turn who would have told her. And now concern to know gave her neither peace nor sleep. It was only because she didn't know, that she kept on speculating.

Better to know.

The next time Tina should offer to unbosom herself, Camilla would hear, especially about the child. Her thoughts all these last five years had gone back to the child.

That, after all, he should be a father!

. . . . . .

When she came in from a morning of shopping she telephoned to Tina that she'd look in again—"if you are going to be alone any time today."

"Sure to be, after five."

But it wasn't so. A candidate for the post of governess was waiting to be inspected in the parlour—so the maid said who opened the door. Mrs. Trenholme would perhaps rather go into the library till the doctor had left. He was up in the nursery now. The woman smiled, and with the ease of the American "servant," she added, "prescribing for a spot on Josephine's chin." She opened the library door and shut it behind the visitor.

A man stepped out of the deep embrasure of the window.

Leroy.

He took her hand. "Well!" he looked at her—for a moment he looked at her so in the old way that she felt she could die of it. What was it—of knowledge, of shared secrets, of ineluctable memory that called to her, claimed her, wived her once again. All that—after the first word "Well"—before he added,

"No need to ask how *you* are. Why did you refuse to see me?"

The silence must, she felt, say "Linda."

"It isn't very—considerate," he went on. "I thought we parted friends."

"Not enemies anyway," she managed to bring out.

"Well then, don't *treat* me like an enemy. There are some papers your father left in my safe—and we have to decide whether we'll sell the New Jersey property that he and I—"

She clasped and unclasped the fastening of her gold mesh bag. He put his hand on hers. "Don't tell me that the calm Camilla has grown nervous."

"No . . ." Her fingers were still. But they were drawn back to her waist—the bag abandoned. Leroy kept his hand on it a moment, and when his hand left her lap it still held the bag.

"I should think the lawyers could settle all that," she said. "I don't know a thing about it."

"It will be explained to you. You are your father's executrix, you oughtn't to neglect his affairs."

Still she hesitated.

He talked about some business of leases, and a railway through the New Jersey property.

She would speak to her lawyer about it and let him know.

She stood up. "Is that all?"

"No, indeed it isn't." He looked at her oddly. "What's your hurry?"

"I think I'd better go."

"Why?"

"Because . . . " she was surprised at the tremor in her voice. She had been thinking how very self-possessed she was—"I don't want to hurt you."

"Then don't."

"That's why—I'm sorry we happened to meet."

"We didn't happen."

"You—?"

"Yes. Bribery and corruption."

"Why—why should you want to see me again?"

"Is that so strange?"

"Very, I should say. I would have expected you to avoid—"

"My dear child, why on earth should I avoid anybody so charming?"

She saw that he enjoyed her embarrassment. Surely that should steel her!

"You don't suppose," he went on, "that I could ever be indifferent—that you would ever be for me quite like anybody else."

He asked questions. They were over-intimate.

"So you've thrown over your Englishman."

"No."

"Oh! yes you have—don't tell *me!* You were to have been married on the 20th. And here you are."

Camilla sat like one convicted. How was she to explain?

"I don't blame you, my dear. Englishmen are all very well—but they don't know how to treat women. And what's going to happen now?"

"Why should anything happen?" she said to her own surprise. "What is to prevent my living alone?"

"All the world of eligible young men, not to speak," he laughed, "of the ineligible. Surely," he bent nearer, "surely you realize that you're too young and *far* too attractive to be allowed to live alone."

"I *have* lived alone—in your sense, for six years."

"The more the miracle. But you've reached the limit."

"You have no earthly reason, Roy," she protested, "to say that."

"Oh, but I have. I can see . . . I can tell. Don't deceive yourself. You've reached the limit."

She stared at him, half hypnotized.

He left it at that. None better than Leroy knew the value of the suggested over and above the explained.

"Don't go! Why should you grudge me a little break in my treadmill round? I work like a dog. You wouldn't know me, Milla."

The old name was like a kiss. He *did* work. His enemies admitted that.

And what did he get out of it all?

Not much, to judge by the phrases of utter pessimism he let fall, those denials of joy which sound so infinitely sadder coming from the light-hearted, from those who have made pursuit of pleasure the main affair of life.

That was what blocked up all the foreground of her thinking. How unhappy he was! Did no one comfort him? What did he do now, she wondered, when the bad dreams came? He had put her in mind of those black midnight wrestlings by saying, "All life now is more or less a bad dream."

She found herself saying inwardly "Poor restless spirit!" with a pity that swept out sense of wrong. And then she remembered that other time when she felt just this same helpless sorrow for him. The memory was so fresh, so poignant that she came out with:

"But now you have a child."

"Linda has."

What awful things he said! That was the worst of shattering some one else's faith. You shattered your own. Now, he couldn't even trust the woman he had sacrificed so much for.

She had seen from behind the hall hangings that he wasn't happy. But what of that? Often he hadn't been happy during those years with her. Suddenly it came over her that she was looking at a man who not only wasn't happy—but who had come to lose faith in happiness.

And for a man like Leroy that must be worse than death.

"Why are you crying, Milla?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Unless it is . . . you've

cared about everything so tremendously. And now you don't seem to care any more."

"Well, in a way that's true."

His look! "It's too great a punishment, I think."

"Punishment?"

"Do you remember what Joanna told me?"

"Joanna?"

"Your old nurse. 'He never in his life wanted anything he didn't get.'"

He laughed. "Well, a bigger bug than old Joanna said: 'There's only one thing worse than not getting what you want. And that is getting it.'"

She looked away, wondering if we were all like Roy with his toys—trying to clutch too many. So we break them.

"Those nightmares!" she said aloud, with the old surface inconsequence which he recognized—"Joanna said they were another form of Too Much."

"So you think of me as a glutton for life. And therefore a dyspeptic."

"Well, loss of appetite—isn't that the sign?"

He looked at her with the intimate "claiming" eye. "Don't imagine I've wholly lost appetite."

"But you have it," she said hastily, "only for strange out-of-the-way things."

"Forbidden fruit?" he smiled again. "Tell me," he went on in a confidential tone: "Was Michael a jealous beggar?"

"Michael?" She blinked like a person roused from dreaming. "Not jealous for himself, I should think. But he makes people jealous *for* him."

"H'm?" Roy stirred in his chair as if the cushions weren't right. His perverse smile embarrassed her. "I wouldn't wonder if Michael had the faculty of making other people jealous, in quite the vulgar old way."

For no earthly reason Camilla blushed.

"I'm sorry," he said lazily, as though the person

under discussion were of very minor moment. "I'm sorry, but I don't think I altogether like your Michael."

With a curious sense of effort, she brought out: "I'm engaged to Mr. Nancarrow."

"Oh, you are! And he's contented to leave it like that?"

"He is following in the next ship. At least, he is sailing tomorrow."

"Poor beggar."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because he'll have his trouble for his pains."

"No, he won't," she protested.

She was angry with Leroy to find that she seemed unable to convince him—angry with herself at being angry; unnerved, unhappy. She would go.

"Tell them to call my chauffeur, please."

She had been afraid he would decline to ring, but no. And when he had rung he made little odds and ends of talk. He held her coat. "Mrs. Trenholme's automobile, please, Sarah." He picked up the bag, man-fashion by the first portion presented to his view. That happened to be the gold fringe. The clasp had been left undone. Out the contents poured.

He apologized. He helped her to gather together her purse, her keys, her handkerchief.

"Why, here's that little old bôite à Milla! The one I bought for you the day—"

If only she hadn't given herself away by anxiously clutching at it he would have returned it unopened. Now he held it out of her reach. He backed away and opened it.

"*Don't* please—"

"Oh, Milla—I'm sorry," he stood repentant before the fall of dust and brown flakes that showered to the floor.

"What was it?" There was still some left in the bottom of the box.

She held out her hand. "You shouldn't have done that," she said with agitation.

"Milla, I *must* know what the grey powder is—no use your looking stubborn. I'll never give the box back till I know. After all *this* isn't Michael's!"

"No, no," she said, "give it to me."

"The box isn't his and, if I know you, you haven't put anything of his into a box I gave you."

"No, of course not."

"Then it's something of mine." He held it out of reach of her beseeching hands. "You can't deny it's something of mine."

She didn't deny it. On the contrary she looked guilty and ashamed.

"Tell me, Milla, what it is?"

She drew her stole closer about her neck. She was going. He opened the box once more and took up a brown flake remaining in the pinch of dust. "It's paper!" He looked up. "Yes—it's paper—something you burnt, and—" his voice dropped. "Milla, it's that letter of mine you burned the last day at Charlton Hill?" He held the box, still, only a foot away from her eyes. As he snapped the lid, he looked over it at the motionless figure. "Oh, Milla, Milla!" Trying to make me think there's anything in this Michael business—and here you go carrying about the world—" his voice suddenly faltered—"all these six years, the ashes of a letter . . . " he held out the treasure box with an air of offering her—in a rush of tenderness—*all*.

She took it with lowered eyes, hotly conscious of his nearness, his very breath on her cheek. She drew back, with fingers closed tight round the recovered treasure.

"Why, Milla," the shaken voice followed her, "do you care so much then, even now?"

"No, no. I don't exactly care. But I don't forget *I did* care."

He came closer—"*You care still?*" She opened her

lips, but he struck in on a note of triumph, "Yes, care still. You can't deny it with that in your hand."

"I don't carry it always. I haven't carried it for six months."

"Ah, Michael!"

"I got it out the day I packed to come—" she couldn't go on.

"—to come home?" he said gently.

She shook her head.

"What made you get it out?"

Still she couldn't speak.

"Well," he went on, "I don't mind telling you I have a very great tenderness for that little box. I've a right to know. . . . What did you mean to do with it?"

"I think," she said very low, "I wanted to leave it down at Charlton Hill."

"Leave it?"

"Yes, hidden somewhere in the sand."

"Milla—"

She drew away. "I shall belong to England. But *this* doesn't belong to England. So I brought it back—like a dead body to be buried at home."

The door opened. "The automobile—"

CHAPTER XVIII

CAMILLA had hardly reached her rooms before Tina, at the telephone, was apologizing, explaining, trying to elicit forgiveness, or even reproach from a Camilla monosyllabic, till at last she said: "Could you come around to the Ritz tonight?"

In the voice of the uneasy conscience, an evidently reluctant Tina promised to be there at a quarter to nine.

She came in with renewed regrets. She hoped Camilla wouldn't misunderstand.

"No. And *you* won't misunderstand if I don't come to your house again."

"Oh . . .!" Tina looked hurt. "You'll come if I promise you Leroy shan't."

"You couldn't prevent him. I don't want you to prevent him. Besides there's Linda."

"Linda?"

"It's just as well I shouldn't be running into *her*."

"You mean . . . you don't know! . . . Leroy . . . James didn't tell you?"

Camilla's heart missed a beat. "She isn't—dead?"

"Dead! Oh, far from dead!" Tina laughed, at her ease again.

"He hasn't left Linda!"

"On the contrary, Linda has left him."

"Left him! Left Leroy?"

"Oh, temporarily, you understand. A very few months after her marriage she was at her tricks again—getting herself talked about in the good old way. Then last summer came the crisis—a renewal of her goings-on with that Western millionaire, Senator Hickson. Leroy couldn't stand Hickson; put down his foot; Linda going on like a mad woman. After she and Leroy had quarrelled for a month, off she goes with a girl friend and the friend's fiancé *and* the Senator, in the Senator's spe-

cial car, to visit the Yellowstone; after that California—all by way of an innocent little tour. Hickson's got a superb Hacienda, a vast estate down beyond San Diego—a Spanish palace by the sea, regular Arabian Nights sort of place. And Linda's the only pebble on the beach."

"It's hard on Leroy," said Camilla with a vision of his face.

"Oh, I don't say Leroy has let the grass grow either. But there's no doubt he *was* hard hit by Linda's going off like that. For he'd put up with a frightful lot."

"How will it end?"

"Some people say it has ended. There is no doubt he has plenty of *grounds* for a divorce."

Then Camilla put the question she had longed to ask Lady Macrae that day at the Fairbairns': "What is the little girl like?"

"Oh! Mollie's a nice child."

"Is she like Leroy?"

"No—image of Linda, but very different really. A sensitive little thing."

"Does Leroy . . . care about her?"

"Roy is nice to all children. But I can see—he never *feels sure.*"

Oh, the ugliness! the ugliness! Camilla leaned her cheek on her hand. Without looking up: "Where is the little girl?"

Mollie was in 59th Street—"with her—with Leroy. It's rather pathetic to see them together. She worships Leroy, follows him about with her eyes, perfectly content if she can sit near him. Sometimes when she comes too close, he shoves her away. And when he sees the poor little face, he gets up and goes out."

Oh, if she had been Camilla's! The waste—the waste in life!

"I hear," Tina went on, in the tone of one who does grudging justice, "that Linda had made all her arrangements to take Mollie along on this precious journey."

"And Leroy objected?"

"Oh, no, Leroy didn't object. Mollie did the objecting. She heard about it the day before, and promptly cried herself sick. Linda realized, I suppose, that Mollie wasn't going to be much of an addition to the party, so she left her behind."

"And if there's a divorce, who will have the child?"

"Why, Leroy, I suppose. Though everybody says she's Hickson's."

"Oh, I'm glad," said Camilla, with face of loathing, "glad that I'm not staying here. I'll go tomorrow!"

"What an idea!" Tina was plainly disturbed by the effect her news was having. "You simply can't get off by tomorrow, with stores to buy and a couple of servants to find—"

For Michael—all that. At the thought, with the name, the heavens came crashing down. All the greater need to get away—to get away from everybody.

"I can't wait for anything. There'll be some of the old people down there, who will do well enough. Well enough for me!"

Tina was taking her leave with some precipitation. "Perhaps I oughtn't to have told you—but how could *I* know you'd take Leroy's affairs so much to heart?"

"It isn't because they're Leroy's affairs," she protested. "It's because—it's the kind of thing that leaves a horrible taste in the mouth."

Tina seemed no less anxious to get away than Camilla to have her go. As though Tina, too, had business that couldn't wait.

When she had gone, though the business directly in front of Camilla was so pressing—and the maid with all that packing to do was waiting for orders in the next room—Camilla stood there, facing the door that had closed behind Tina.

A partial power of motion came back with a single word shaped by silent lips: Michael.

She sat down in the nearest chair and bowed her face in her hands.

"Michael! what dreadful thing have I done? I've told you to come! And your coming isn't the least use in the world!"

. . . . . .

She couldn't marry Michael.

She couldn't marry anybody. An intense and sickening disgust for the whole sorry business, invaded her like a tide of foulness. It rose and choked her. She struggled against it with heavy sobbing. "Oh, Michael, the ugliness! And you can't save me. I should only spatter you . . . I who love cleanness. And good faith. *Good faith!*" she whispered the words, brokenly, like a prayer. Every other good under the sun might be made to wear a doubtful face, but never that. Faith *was* good. Good faith was the abiding Good. All this trouble, as she saw plainer now than ever, came from not keeping your word. People made vows. Vows didn't mean you would do thus and thus, if it turned out easy and pleasant. No vows needed for that. Yet people made vows and, when it wasn't easy to keep the vows, people thought they had only to break the vows to have done with them.

Vows wouldn't stand that. A broken vow was an enemy; implacable. It hunted you down.

Leroy.

Poor little Mollie.

She, Camilla, had made vows too. Sealed them with her body and her soul. Could she undo that?

While her lips shaped "No" her mind swung back with anguish—*Michael!* Sailing tomorrow. To come all that way and find her gone! Unforgivable. Yet that was what was going to happen. She looked at the clock. Nearly half-past nine. Michael long ago asleep. It was after two in the morning by London time. Sailing today!

Suddenly she was on her feet. Why shouldn't she stop him at the dock. She might even stop him in London. She had—heaven be praised—she had at the worst, nine hours. She was saved! Michael was saved a bootless and humiliating errand. She ran from the bell to the writing-table, and wrote out in duplicate the message: "*Don't come. Writing.*" One copy was addressed to the shipping office at Liverpool, and one to Michael's club. His last cable had been sent from London.

While she waited for the messenger, she began the letter to Michael. Other things might be put off. Michael mustn't be left an hour in ignorance.

"Come in!" She rose with the cables in her hand.

Ogden Marriott stood there.

"Oh! I thought it was. . . . But come in!"—for he had stopped short between the table and the door.

"What has happened?"

Standing there, with the messages in her hand, she told him Tina's news.

"Oh, *that!*" He put down his hat. Yes, he'd heard the story of the Senator.

"And you said nothing about it to me!"

He would have, he assured her gently, "if—" but he left the contingency vague. She was going away so soon, it didn't seem worth while.

Well, she was going sooner even than she planned.

Her set face drew him nearer. Drew him as, on a different plane, the passer-by is drawn at the cry of Fire! —or like those crowding round a street accident, or mustered instinctively at any sign that some one of us has met an intenser experience than we ourselves may know. It is so we try a finger at the razor edge of life.

"My poor child!" broke from him, and then he, too, fell silent.

The boy had come for the cables.

Without turning she offered them to Marriott. He took them, but it was several seconds before his gaze dropped from her averted face.

"Are you sure," he said presently, "*quite* sure you want to send these?"

Her answer was to hold out her hand. She took them to the door. She gave them with special charges, in a voice unchanged.

Marriott stood watching her narrowly. He dreaded the moment when the door would have shut upon the messenger, and Camilla would turn round to face the irrevocable.

Had she "kept up" only till she had done this thing, and would her courage break at last? No such sign as she came back and went round the writing-table to her seat. She stood there looking down on the unfinished letter. A mere deepening of her usual pallor, a little strain about the mouth, some hint of recent tears—the marks in her of stress and suffering, slight as they were, unverifiable to eyes less seeing, cried to him, gripped his heart. "What can be done!"

"I don't know," she said. "I can't see, yet, any farther than this." Her fingers touched the paper where the first words stood out clear: *My dear Michael.*

"But you'll tell me," he began, "how it is—what it is . . . why—"

"When I've told Michael, I shall know better how to tell you."

She sat down with an effort of rapidly ebbing strength. He was quickly at her side, but through his anxious words of sympathy she asked: "Tomorrow, early—could you come?" It was less question than dismissal. For a moment he went on with his poor phrases of comfort: "Time, devotion of friends. . . ." No syllable of it reached the door of her mind. She sat with eyes looking out across the letter. . . . Across the ocean?

On a card Marriott wrote a number and a line, and left it on the book that lay open at her elbow. He did not stay to say "good night"—she had forgotten him. But he looked back, before he closed the door. She had not

moved till now. As he stood that second on the threshold, the dark lashes were lowered—not to vision, he felt, but to night and nothingness. It was like a drawing down of blinds in a house where some one has died.

. . . . . .

Marriott sent up a note at nine the next morning, to ask if he should attend to her Pullman reservations, or, he added significantly, whatever sort of tickets she might be needing. Anyway, he was waiting till he knew when he might see her.

The answer went back: she was going out at eleven. He might come before or after, whichever suited him.

It suited him to come at once.

. . . . . .

She turned away from the telephone to say good morning. Instead of the sympathy he brought her, the words that reached his lips were: "You've had news!"

But no, she had heard no news. "They were asking for mine: Tina; my brother-in-law; Harrington."

"Oh, I dare say!" As he deposited his hat, he looked round on the great jars of long-stemmed Jaqueminot roses. There were two vessels, of punch-bowl size, full of lilies-of-the-valley. They had made the place, to Marriott's sense, "smell like a florist's or a funeral." "If your friends would have the kindness to let you alone! How white you are!" he ejaculated, as she stood there, leaning against the tall chair.

"It isn't often I don't sleep."

"You didn't sleep at all?"

"Not at all!" She smiled with a curious content, as if not to sleep were an advantage.

For all the pallor of suffering, there was an expression in her eyes. . . . What was it?

"Well, I, too, come asking: What do you mean to do?"

"I shall go home—Florida."

Ah! yes. It called and comforted. He could see that.

"You want to get away from all this shifting and disloyalty?"

"To be alone," she said.

He had hoped—he brought it out, hesitating—that he, in his poor way, as he called it, might be of some help to her.

"Help has come," she said.

Even though it hadn't been his part to bring it, at the new note in her voice his spirit stirred and plumed its wings. "Why, after all, should you leave us?"

"Because I must live my life away from all this." The arrested movement of her hand seemed to have swept away the over-decorated, restless room. Yet he saw clearly enough she wasn't meaning merely the hotel *milieu,* so increasingly dear to the American woman. Nor yet such people as, in the main, frequent those Temples of Transiency, with their pathetic American genius for reproducing, for improving upon, the glittering outside. What this particular American wanted to "get away from" was, Marriott guessed, something less tangible than superabundance of gilt, brocade, and telephones. Something more than insistent voices along the wires, and faces at the door. He believed he had read her thought when, upon his note of melancholy, he agreed: "There *are* times when flight and solitude are the supreme needs, the strongest instincts of the soul. You are right. You will find healing down there among the clean staunch pines."

"Oh, I'll find—" the sentence seemed to die, not so much for lack of words as from fulness of vision.

It struck him that she stood there, less like one who has come to the End, than like one who stands at the Beginning.

He had been going to tell her that. And she had found it out for herself! Was she conscious, too, "at the beginning" of what?

"And after Florida? But no"—he looked away with

an effect of embarrassment. "It is too soon to expect you to see so far." He said it half under his breath. But she heard. She caught it up.

"Oh, I see! Even if I don't see clearly. I see it!"

Something in the accent made his heart shrink. So have the faithful cried out of sacrificial fires. "I've told Michael," she triumphed.

"You might tell me, Camilla." There was no jar for her in his use of her name. With gratitude he realized that, as she turned slightly towards him with a faint groping movement.

"My dear!" He took her hand, half hesitating.

She laid her other over it. "I want you to help me to hold fast to something. It isn't anything very great or shining. But it will mean a great deal to me."

"Oh, it will shine, my dear, if it's your lamp!"

She shook her head. "I don't need any more to be consoled for my deficiencies. Do you know why? Because I feel it in me to be—not clever, but something I haven't yet been."

What?

"I . . ." She began to speak, and then, with her aloof smile, shook her head. "It's too new."

"Since you've told—you might *try* to tell me."

"All I know clearly yet is . . . it will be something *worth* being. I shall feel that always now!" As she turned to face him with her boast that in some high fashion she was beyond the reach of alarms and beyond the curse of pettiness, the end of the lace scarf that hung over her shoulder caught among the long-stemmed roses. She bent over the great jar to detach the lace. Was it an insolence in the unseasonable pomp of roses, was it the touch of thorns that brought her spirit down? "Unless—"

"Unless?"

"Unless I am near Leroy. Always, always he makes me feel I am a child—a dull child. And so I slip down, down, till I *am* a dull child."

"You aren't a dull child with me," he said gently.

"Not with Michael, anyway! Oh, no! I am better than myself with Michael."

"It is one of the great tests of human intercourse," he acknowledged gravely. "I could almost say *the* test."

"The great test is, I can go on feeling it, without Michael. And, 'without Michael,' that's how I shall have to live."

The plummet-sounding gaze he dropped into her eyes seemed to ask: Is this one of the hours when resolves are taken and irrevocable ends are reached?

"You don't imagine you will go the rest of the journey alone?"

"Imagine? I know. All that is finished."

He smiled his faint wiseacre smile. "You are not the kind."

"You all keep saying that. It's not true. Why shouldn't I do what others have done?"

"No one as young, and as . . . no one like you *has* done so."

"You know that isn't true."

"No one outside of a religious house," he insisted.

"What a fine thing, then, to make one's own religious house!"

So this was what she was seeing!

She met his old unbelief with her new faith. "It lies with women to make that refuge for themselves. To make it Home."

"There isn't such a home," he said, with odd vehemence, "for normal men and women. Except in the little house six by two."

"You make it the more my part to prove . . . to show the Lindas and the rest. . . . After all"—she threw off her weighted look—"I take too much on myself. Thousands have proved it, besides the nuns."

"You mean the superfluous women?"

"I am not sure there are any." She faced him: "What if I could help to prove that?"

"You know what I mean," he said severely. "The women who can't marry."

"We mustn't be too sure about them," she cautioned. "Anyway, of those who don't, some have had the fullest, greatest lives that ever have been lived."

He didn't know those lives.

"No," she agreed. "I believe men don't. Or, if they do, they forget. But they've been *full,* the sort of lives I mean. And happy . . . if that matters."

"You doubt it matters?"

"Oh! it matters to me," she admitted humbly. "And 'knowing' matters. I shouldn't have liked never to have been married. I should have always imagined—"

"That it was a finer thing than experience proves?" he smiled.

"I am sorry for spinsters who are very poor, or who haven't education . . . interests. But I . . ." She smiled suddenly with lips that quivered.

"You—?"

"I begin to see . . . just *begin* to see I have more to put into my days than I shall have days to fill, even if I live to be old. And I don't think I'll live to be old."

The tears came into his eyes. "In those days, few or many, count me, my dear."

"This is something I have to work out alone," she said gently. "It has to do with Recompense. Nature's kind. The kind that"—she picked her way in a world of new images, new ideas—"the kind that, when a man's eyes are out, gives him a double power of hearing."

He looked at her wondering. Had she in the night watches learned a lesson in that higher Arithmetic by which to take away is to augment?

"We must trust her. . . . Then . . . Nature won't leave us unrecompensed." She dropped out her disconnected sentences. It had not greatly changed her—the

Vision, whatever it was. She could reflect it only in broken lights. A life that should be full, but not of "all this." Just because—and this seemed to be the heart of her new assurance—just because the life that lay before her was to be definitely, and for all time, clear of "all this," it would have the larger space for a larger hope. Or, if not larger, *different*. And very good.

"My dearest of women—"

"No, no! I couldn't expect you to understand." She comforted him for that. "No man can, perhaps. The thing I mean, when he gets a glimpse of it, it frightens him as it frightened Balzac." She glanced from the still open book on the table to the roses that lorded it over all. "There are too many flowers here. I must go out." And Mr. Marriott wasn't to think her ungrateful if she went alone. To St. Patrick's. To hear the singing. But if he'd wait for her a moment, they could go down together, and settle about the tickets.

She went into the next room, and Marriott picked up the open book. He had asked her the day before, "What made you get this? Oh, she had seen it at Brentano's, and . . . He smiled again at her characteristic *naïveté*, "I knew a French bull-dog once, they called Cousine Bette."

As he turned the pages, he chanced on a passage that was marked. And where the word *virginité* occurred, it was crossed out and in the margin was written *Chasteté*.

La virginité, comme toute les monstruosités, a des richesses spéciales, des grandeurs absorbantes.

La Vie, dont les forces sont economisées, a pris chez l'individu vierge une qualité de résistance et de durée incalculable. Le cerveau s'est enrichi dans l'ensemble de ses facultés réservées. Lorsque les gens chaste ont besoin de leur corps ou de leur âme, qu'ils recourent à l'action ou à la pensée, ils trouvent alors de l'acier dans leur muscles ou de la science infuse dans leur intelligence, une force diabolique ou la magic noire de la volonté.

. . . . . .

La Virginité mère des grandes choses magna parens rerum, *tient dans ses belles mains blanches la clef des mondes superieurs.*

The telephone! It rang steadily till she came back buttoning her coat.

Most voices reach you harsher over the wires. Leroy's was gentler. "That you, Camilla? Tina's got an absurd idea in her head that you want to get off to Florida tonight."

"Yes, I am all packed—going tonight."

"But how can you? You've forgotten that business matter. The lawyers can't possibly draw those papers up till they have your instructions."

Silence along the wire for several seconds.

Then at the other end: "Say, Camilla, are you there?"

"Yes."

"You—a— If you're afraid of meeting me—"

"I'm not at all afraid. Why should I be? It's only. . . . I had forgotten—"

"I thought that must be it. Will you write to your lawyers, or will you commission me?"

She left it in his hands. "Only . . . Leroy!"

"Yes."

"See if they can't manage it today, some time."

"Today! My dear child! You don't happen to have heard today's Sunday?"

"Oh, of course! I am just going to St. —— to church. Tomorrow, early, then."

"There isn't a ghost of a chance before the afternoon. You are not in such a hurry—?"

"Yes."

He would see what he could do. She should hear tomorrow. "Wait a moment. Are you there? Well . . . a . . . what was it? Oh, I know. Did you get some flowers?"

"Yes." She thanked him.

"Come," she said to Marriott, "this place stifles me."

CHAPTER XIX

THE next afternoon found her closeted, down town, with an old friend of her father's; the Trenholmes' legal adviser, also an old man; a stenographer, and Leroy. His demeanour, grave, watchfully considerate—of a correctness to make the heart ache—if you remembered the old Leroy.

A disputed question arose involving reference to a deed which Leroy had failed to bring. "I think, anyhow," he said, "this is as much of the ground as we can usefully cover today. We mustn't wear out Mrs. Trenholme's patience."

Could she come tomorrow?

She felt she couldn't ask the benevolent old gentleman how necessary was her coming. And she had no other means of knowing whether Leroy was spinning out the business. After all, why *should* he?

Tomorrow then.

Leroy took her down and saw her into her limousine. And here he failed. He handed her in too much in the old way. She shrank out of his solicitous hands and bolted into her seat. He sent a curious look after her. "You are in a great hurry," was his comment.

"Yes," she said nervously. "I didn't expect to lose more than a day over this."

"So anxious to be off!"

"More anxious than I can say. You'll hurry the business all you can, won't you?"

He looked at her through the open window. "I catch myself wondering if it's really you." Then abruptly to the driver—"The Ritz. And the lady is in a hurry."

. . . . . .

He was the last to arrive the following day. Mrs.

Trenholme and the lawyers had waited for him nearly a quarter of an hour.

Camilla's first thought, when he came in with an apology, was: he hasn't slept. Then, as she observed him covertly: he has been drinking, she said to herself. Oh! not heavily. Just a cocktail or so too much. But she was ashamed. Even more, she was watchful. If he were to make a slip, she must do something to cover it up. She even turned over the possibility of taking him away with her. But that wouldn't do. People would misunderstand. The others seemed not to notice anything.

Not without its own strange effect on her, this consciousness that, though perhaps only she could detect the fact, Roy wasn't quite himself. Along with the pain and anxiety, the knowledge released some latent power in her, a power of criticizing, judging. She suddenly felt much older, able to decide things, to say to one: You are wrong; to another: I see something you are blind to. Always, up to now, she had been guided. Now, as her unwilling eye swept the heavy figure of the man—now, she told herself, she was the fitter to guide. Strangely, in that lawyer's office, whither she had come for counsel, she felt abler to give advice and to render judgment than ever she had been in her life. It was as if sitting there she had suddenly attained her majority.

A moment came when Leroy fumbled his papers; he dropped his pen. She felt herself grow hot for him; her eyes fell. Not that with her there was any remnant left of the old illusion, and nothing, she told herself of the old love. It was just a . . . well, a lingering sense of responsibility towards the man she had given vows to. How could you—she found herself putting that silent question as she took the stiff legal cap paper that was handed for her approval—how could you take back a vow? That is to say, how could she? "Camilla hasn't any mental elasticity," Leroy had once said. "She can go straight on, farther than most. She can't turn quick

corners." Well, Linda could turn corners. Had he really liked that better?

But this—was he often in this state? Very likely nobody but she would notice anything. How well she knew the signs. It was like being with him under his skin. Marriage: and people talked of undoing *that!*—people like these two old lawyers with their childish airs and omnipotence, their "it was not the finding of the Courts"—"the Law" . . .! gravely quoting fictions set up by yet other men a long way off from youth and the swift instruction of the blood, old men quoting rules for playing a sedentary game, lucrative for the skilful—higher stakes than poker. *Let* them make counters of houses, of leases and lands. But Marriage!—conceive from their dreaming they could make and unmake that!

Away from the two intent old faces, the bald heads bent, her eyes went roving. They stopped by the fattest "calf" in the stall of books, *Marriage Laws.* Smaller print particularized: "in the State of New York." Wasn't it *like* them!

As if human nature in New York were different from human nature in New Jersey, or New Guinea. As if the real Laws of Marriage weren't framed by the same Lawgiver that kept the North Star true and ruled the rolling worlds!

A wrinkled old hand was held out for the paper.

"Is that in accordance with—?"

Yes, so far as she could see. . . . "And so it's finished now?" She gathered her furs about her.

"Yes, all but the engrossing and witnessing."

"What! Another day lost!" She met Roy's heavy eyes. "I must," she said, "I *must* get off tomorrow night."

The papers could be sent up for her signature. He would see to it.

As before he took her down to the street. "And so you go to the old place?" he said.

"Yes."

"You and your Englishman?"

"I shall be alone."

"You don't mean to say the Englishman fails you?"

"No, he doesn't fail anybody. It's I who fail. I cabled him not to come."

"*You did that!*" He stopped with his hand on the door. "When did you do that, Milla?"

"Please—"

He opened the door. As she drove away he was still standing there.

When she reached the hotel a piece of paper was put in her hand, asking her to call up a certain number. She knew before she heard it, what voice would answer.

"Have you got your stateroom?"

"No, I couldn't till I knew when this business would be settled."

But had she any idea of the crush of Southern travel at this time? "When *I* go south I make my reservation two weeks in advance." She'd better let him see about it. It was her only chance, and that was slim. "Sometimes a director of a road—" He would ring her up during the evening.

"I won't be here," she said. But she'd get the message when she came in.

"Where are you going?"

"Where am I going!"

"Yes." As she didn't answer, "Don't you see, I could tell you what I'd been able to do, if I—" He waited. No sound. "What?"

"I—don't just know where I'll be."

"Don't *know!* Oh! look here, Camilla—"

"I'm dining out."

"And you don't know where you are dining?"

"No."

He laughed that gentle, mocking laugh. "Do you know who you're dining with?"

No sound out of Camilla.

"I'm sorry. I apologize. I didn't know it was a secret."

"It's not at all a secret. I'm dining with Mr. Marriott."

"Oh!—Old Spectacles! Well, you'll have a hilarious time of it."

Mr. Marriott called for her at her rooms.

She had been seeing him every evening. Yet she went towards him now with outstretched hand and such eagerness of welcome, as made him study her face.

"I don't know how I'd get through this time but for you." She had said that once before, after the meeting in the Sambourne library. "What's happened?" Mr. Marriott had asked that other evening.

"Nothing. Yes. I've seen Leroy."

"I could have sworn it!" And not another word about Leroy. The talk was about travel and foreign chancellories and pleasant home things. What, indeed, would she have done without this friend?

He knew about the meetings at the lawyers' and hadn't approved of them. "Your agent could attend to all that for you."

"My father's old friend seemed to agree with Leroy that I ought to be made to understand . . . maybe I ought to learn to—"

That telephone!

Leroy again. There wasn't a stateroom on either Southern line for ten days. Didn't she think she'd better wait?

Impossible. She'd put up with a section. She *must* get off tomorrow. "What if you can't get one?" she echoed. "Surely there'll be a section."

"Tell him," prompted Marriott, "if there isn't a section to be had, you'll go by daytrain to Washington and trust to luck."

She repeated that.

Marriott's voice, held low, added that people sometimes cancelled at the eleventh hour. She repeated that, too.

"You are very much up in Pullman matters all of a sudden. Who's prompting you? Spectacles?"

"Good-bye." She hung up the receiver.

"You aren't going to let him keep you here in New York?" Marriott demanded. As she didn't answer: "Few things would amuse him more."

It was the word "amuse" that stung. "I don't think you are always fair to Leroy. I'm ready," she said at the door.

But Marriott lingered as if he'd forgotten something. "May I use your telephone?"

He rang up the Pullman office. After some preliminary: "What? Last two sections just gone! Who took them? Mr. Trenholme? This moment. I see. What have you for the next night? Yes. Very well, a section and an upper berth for Thursday. Mrs. L. Trenholme. Yes."

"There must be some mistake," Camilla said as Marriott left the telephone. "Or, do you think"—she stopped short on her way to the hall—"can Leroy be going South?"

"I don't think that is the explanation," said Marriott dryly.

"Then who will be in those two sections?"

"Nobody. They'll go empty as far as Washington. Just so that you shouldn't be in one of them."

. . . . . .

Twenty-four hours of heavy-falling snow lay in the streets and clogged the side-walks. The shovelling and banking along the kerb made little difference to the choked thoroughfares. But the city had put on beauty.

All that night the snow fell steadily. Surface train and street-car service broke down. Automobiles skidded and stuck and gave up. If you wanted a taxi you waited

half an hour, and were glad to observe a discreetly crawling hansom, or a hack—vehicles you had never thought to behold plying those streets again.

The next day shone cold and clear over a transfigured city. Camilla, at the window in the afternoon, looked out—with prisoner's eyes. All day, in here, she had been pent up with sins and penances, with thoughts too poignant to be borne quiescently. Was it the best she could have done, or was it the worst—to send that cable? There were moments when she would have given years of her life to be able to recall it. Yet if it were back in her hand that moment, she knew that it would go forth again.

Being delayed here in New York—that was what strained the cords of resolution. What did Leroy want with those sections?

She had had a further difference with Mr. Marriott on that score. She had almost quarelled with him. He had returned to the Pullman question over their coffee the night before. What things he had said! She burned at the memory.

"I've warned you. Trenholme doesn't mean you to go."

"I am sure you are wrong," Camilla had said. "What object could he have?"

"The object of a man thoroughly unscrupulous in his dealings with women."

"I can't have you saying that."

And he had gone on. Leroy was playing with her. "It's a shame!" he had cried, for once blazing through those cold spectacles. "But for him Nancarrow would be on his way. You think *you've* put him off. It was Trenholme. Trenholme doesn't mean you to marry."

. . . . . .

That telephone again!

She called for her hat and furs.

She hadn't been walking half an hour before the sunshine went out under a heavy cloud. More snow.

On her way back, near the corner which commanded the flank approach, as well as the main entrance to the hotel, a familiar figure stood, snow-powdered. He was coming to meet her—Leroy.

"What weather for you to be ploughing through snow! Where have you been?"

He put his question exactly as he had used—exactly as if she still must account to him—

"I've just been walking."

"You haven't been walking all day, I suppose?"

"No."

"How long?"

"Really, Leroy—"

"Really, Camilla. What's the matter with your telephone?" She looked down at her snow-covered coat.

"Is Marriott so kind as to advise you not to answer your telephone calls?"

"It's too cold out here—" She moved towards the entrance.

"I could hardly believe," the voice went on at her side, "that you of all women would allow yourself to be put in a position so undignified. What business is it of Marriott's what you and I say to each other?"

"He only wanted to help me. He has helped me."

"Oh! and how has he managed to do that? By making love to you?"

"Oh, *Leroy!*" She stopped short. Then beginning to walk quickly again. "He's got me a section for tomorrow."

"Well, you'll have the trouble of countermanding that."

"Oh, no! I shan't countermand it."

"You wouldn't rather have the stateroom?"

"You said there wasn't one."

"There wasn't. I've bought off a man who had one."

"For tomorrow?"

"For tomorrow. And I've arranged to have those

papers sent up to you tomorrow to be signed."

"It's very kind of you. Of course I'll gladly take the stateroom."

"How did you and Spectacles get home last night?"

"We walked. I wish you wouldn't call my friend—"

"You walked. . . . He let you *walk!* A night like—"

"There wasn't anything on wheels to be had."

"I wish you had let me know. I'd have seen you got home properly. I was afraid Spectacles wasn't to be trusted."

Camilla, with an awkwardness that Leroy relished, was trying to leave him. A call-boy ran out to give something to a departing guest. He caught sight of Mrs. Trenholme and came towards her—hesitating whether to interrupt and being sworn at by the Commissionaire.

"That's my special bell-boy," she explained as she smiled at the raw Irish lad—so much less sophisticated than the ordinary worldly-minded cynics in the Ritz employ that, following upon a colossal blunder in her service, she had characteristically adopted him. "What is it, Terence?"

"I tho't ye moight loike t' know. A gintleman's been waitin' fur ye this foive and thirrty minyuts."

"A gentleman! Not Mr. Marriott?"

"No. 'Tis stranger he'll be."

"Your Englishman," said Leroy.

"No, no! I cabled him not to come."

"As if that would prevent any man!"

. . . . . .

She stood outside the door a moment.

Michael! Michael!

Her key made no noise in the lock. Slowly, in a lamed fashion, she opened the door.

Yes, the stranger was there, sitting in the shadow, in an attitude of profound weariness.

When he lifted his head, it was Mr. James Trenholme. She was too amazed to find a greeting.

"You didn't expect *me!*" he said dryly, as he held out his hand.

"No, I—" She stood there in the old way, inept before the unexpected. Still dazed, she suggested that he might sit down.

"*You* are looking well." In the cold arraignment of his eye that fact appeared to her discredit. "The papers have been telling us," he said, as he resumed his seat, "that you were going to marry a man over yonder." His slight pause presented an opening for affirmation or denial. She sat speechless.

"I would have a heavy tax," he said angrily, "on heiresses marrying out of their own country—"

"It wouldn't affect me," she brought out.

"You mean"—he drew his level brows together and looked shrewdly from under his slight scowl—"you've thrown the Englishman over?"

She bit her lips. "I . . . we aren't going through with it."

"So I was told. That's why I'm here." He placed a hand on either knee and looked at her fixedly. "You've seen Leroy." He didn't ask, he stated the fact.

"Yes."

"Well, what do you think of your work?"

She half rose: "*My* work!"

"You don't need me to tell you," he said bitterly, "that things don't go well with Leroy. You did a bad day's work when you left him to that—harpy!" After a pause which she made no effort to fill, he leaned forward: "You shouldn't have done it, Camilla."

"I—*I* 'left'? Surely you know he left me?"

"Nonsense!" He took his hands off his knees and threw himself back in the chair. "No married man can leave his wife if she doesn't wish."

Camilla opened her lips in protest. But they closed without a sound.

"Suppose you hadn't gone away"—he leaned forward again and presented the alternative on his open palm. "Suppose you hadn't applied for a divorce . . . can't you see what would have happened?" She shook her head.

"Roy would have come back all right, as thousands of other men have done. If you'd had a little patience."

Was that true? She had never thought of it like that.

"I wouldn't have known but for you," the hard voice went on, "that I had any faith to lose. I thought I was done with depending on women for anything. But it seems I wasn't done. I had come to depend on you. I *counted* on you."

She lifted her eyes. That she dropped them was due not to the reprehension that she read in James Trenholme's face, so much as the heavy trouble there.

"For some reason, or for no reason I'd come to feel, Camilla will hold the fort. And you didn't."

There was no sound in the room for several seconds.

"You see what he is now. What you don't know is: he hasn't been the same since you deserted."

"You mustn't say 'deserted,'" she protested, stung at last to speech. "It's *too* wide of the mark—"

"You did desert." He faced her down. "But what's done is done. All I've come to say is, *Don't do it again.* You stay here and look after your job."

Her slack hands came together. "It *isn't* my job. Not now. Not any more"—she seemed to plead with him.

"Not your job any more!" He made a gesture of contempt and jerked his head to one side. "Like all the rest!" He seemed to give in to an unseen adversary. "Not her job any more!" And now those hawk's eyes were at her again. And the talons of his speech were clawing at her. "Didn't you undertake the job? Of your own free will? Yes, undertook it and abandoned it."

"Linda—" she brought out, breathless.

"*Linda!*"—he blew the name to atoms. He got up. He stood in front of Camilla. An iron engine of a man, charged with incalculable energies, more a symbol of power than she had ever realized him. "If," he said impressively, "if the good women stuck to their business, the bad women wouldn't have *that* chance!" He snapped his thin fingers. In the act of turning on his heel he halted and again looked down at the figure in the chair—as if catching sight of something now that had escaped him before. "You didn't realize that? Well, if you were a child then, you aren't a child now." He drew a chair to her side. "I don't mind telling you . . . that I, too . . . I've missed my daughter."

Camilla lifted her head. "Thank you. But what I have to know is—did he ask you to come and—?"

"No; hasn't a notion," he said quickly.

"How, then, do you know that he—that Leroy wants—?"

"Don't I know my own flesh and blood? The morning after you landed—I hadn't seen the arrival list—when he came into the office: 'What is it?' I said. 'What's what?' 'What's happened?' He laughed. "'Well, the only thing I know that's happened is: Camilla's come back.' Like that for the next three days. Coming in to talk McCoy and Corporation Law, and—in the middle—'I've arranged to see Camilla.' His face like a boy's. Then: 'I've seen her!'—she's this; she's that; and how you were to meet him at the office of Dunn, Hardy & Horlick. Next day, the light gone out. 'Didn't she come?' 'Oh! yes, she came, hard as—wood, dying to get out of New York.' And then Leroy off to . . . *I* don't know where." He was silent a moment. "One of the things I used to like about you—you didn't drink cocktails."

"Only because I didn't like them."

"Don't care what the reason was. The effect was that

Leroy didn't. Not half, not a hundredth so much as . . ." The chin went down, the spare vigorous frame took on again that attitude of fatigue in which Camilla had surprised him. "Leroy's habits aren't what they were," he went on. "And that's why his work isn't what it was. All that promise—! But he's young. You are both young enough to make a fresh start.

Back and forth her thoughts went flying across great spaces in time and feeling. She lost count of petty moments and of immediate conditions. Such journeys the soul must take alone; she lost count of the other presence. She and Roy were struggling to find a footing in the void. Could they live together as friends? Could he bear that? Frankly regarded, could she?

James Trenholme bent down and laid a hand on her shoulder. She started as if he had called her. "Yes, father. I mean . . ." A quick flush had risen in her face.

"That's right, my child."

She tried to say no, she hadn't meant that; but the form in which she would have to rectify her blunder sounded overharsh, too like a wounding repudiation, a rebuff to a proud man who had shown her his wounds. Oh, why had she said "Father"? There had been no need. Every reason *not* to say it. But out it had come. It echoed still in the air. It was like an oath of service.

He had kissed her on the forehead and was gone.

CHAPTER XX

"THERE will be no question of getting out of New York, given a few more hours of weather like this."

After two days' silence, Marriott had looked in upon Camilla's final preparations, towards seven the next evening.

She swept a litter of letters and telegrams into the wastepaper basket. "A few more hours, and I shall be out of the storm zone."

"So—you are still meaning to go?"

"Still meaning? There was never any doubt of my going—after you were so good as to secure that section."

"Oh! I heard you'd countermanded it."

"That was because I was able to get a stateroom."

"A stateroom. . . .!" If he had not been aware before that the stream of confidence had run dry, he realized the fact now, as he looked at the mask-like white face with the averted eyes. Oh! he knew his crime. He had been a sharer in that high Sunday mood of renunciation. Though he hadn't approved, he had been Witness. Workaday life can ill adapt itself to the august companionship of the Recording Angel. All unwilling, Marriott stood for reminder of a broken resolve. "I suppose you are *sure*. There is no mistake about your stateroom."

"Quite sure."

"Who has the ticket?"

"Who? Why, I have it, of course."

"Have you any objection to letting me see?"

A faint tinge of indignation flushed her cheeks as she produced an envelope. While Mr. Marriott, with every sign of incredulity, scrutinized the ticket, a letter was brought in. His eyes left the slip in his hand and fastened on the letter. Camilla opened and read.

"I have not told and I shall not tell Leroy that I have seen you. You will speak for yourself when the time comes.

"Your affectionate father,
"JAMES TRENHOLME."

She lifted her head and met Marriott's eyes.

"Well," she said, folding up the letter, "are you satisfied about the ticket?"

"It appears to be for tonight," he said grudgingly. "What time shall you be going down?"

The train was the well-known Midnight Southern Express. She said her plan was to be at the Depôt about half-past ten and go comfortably to bed.

Marriott showed his approval by saying he would come and take her down if she liked.

No, she wouldn't trouble him.

He focussed her reproachfully through the great rounds of his glasses. But Camilla saw no reason to explain—after the way he had spoken of Leroy—that the misjudged person had sent a note, with the tickets, to say that he was putting his automobile at her disposal. It (not he) would call for her at ten o'clock, or any time she liked. "There is only one chauffeur in New York," the note added, "who can be trusted in streets like these."

Mr. Marriott rose to go.

"It's no night," she said, "for anybody to be out who doesn't have to be. Good-bye—"

Her hand was out, not his. He sat down again and threw his hat on the table. The telephone rang.

After a moment's hesitation, Camilla took up the receiver.

"Those papers. . . . I haven't forgotten. They seem to been sent up to my house, by some mistake." Leroy was speaking from the office. An unusually heavy day's work, or he'd have tracked those papers down before. He wasn't going to take any chances about their reach-

ing her in time. He would go and get them himself.

She remonstrated. Getting about was so difficult. The papers could follow her to Florida.

That might do, he said, "except for a point in the Jersey deed that your man Dunn was afraid you mightn't understand. I promised him I'd clear it up before you signed. I'll be round during the evening."

Before she could answer he had rung off.

She turned to find Marriott had vanished.

At ten o'clock she put on her hat. "Isn't the automobile there?" she asked her maid.

"Not yet."

Camilla waited an impatient ten minutes. "Telephone them to get a taxi." Another ten minutes. "Can't they get a taxi? Then we'll walk. Find somebody to bring the suit-cases."

By the time she got down to the entrance the taxi was there. And so was Mr. Trenholme's automobile. And out of it Mr. Trenholme was stepping.

"Where you going? *Taxi!* Given me up? Why, it's only a few minutes past ten, and your train doesn't go for nearly two hours."

It was all right now he had come—she was only afraid he'd broken down.

"We don't break down, do we, Hutin?" he tossed out to his chauffeur. "Shan't be long." He turned to go into the hotel.

Camilla's maid, in the act of paying the taxi driver, hesitated with her hand in her purse: "Would Mrs. Trenholme perhaps prefer that she should go with the small baggage and get things ready for the night?"

Leroy applauded such forethought. Then hurriedly to Camilla: "I've run that deed to earth—we'll just look through it." He led the way back into the hotel.

It struck her how like old times it was to be following at his heels. Straight on he led her, avoiding the ele-

vator, up one flight, and into a great deserted room with many shaded lamps and a blazing fire.

"I've never been here before. What do they call this room?"

She understood Leroy, pulling off his coat, to say that he hadn't been invited to the christening.

Independently of the blazing open fire, the atmosphere everywhere indoors was heavy with steam heat. Camilla loosened her furs. He put a chair for her at the great ornate writing table, and a chair for himself. He took a bulky paper out of his pocket, and laid it open under her eyes. There! She was to read that.

"Not all through!"

"What! you'd sign a paper without reading it! You *do* need somebody to look after you." He bent over her, explaining, enlarging. "Now, you mustn't go to sleep over this. This is the most important point."

"I *wasn't* going to sleep!" Oh, the times in the past she had defended herself against that charge! "It's so hot in here."

"Well, of course, muffled up as if you were exploring the Antarctic!" He helped her off with her coat. "Now pay attention to this." With an air of conscientious discharge of duty, he attacked "clause eleven." No possible aspect of clause eleven was left uncanvassed. It was as if all Camilla's fortunes hung on clause eleven. He sounded immensely legal. It was all as simple to *him* as one, two, come buckle my shoe. Camilla's woolly brain was woollier than common. The heat! The nearness. . . . That faint Russian leather scent—

"There now! is that quite clear?"

Camilla, in a thickening mist, nodded sleepily.

"But," she said with solemnity, "I think eleven clauses are too many—"

"Stupid woman!" he threw in, passing on to clause twelve.

Camilla looked at him. "You mustn't be . . . so familiar."

Leroy leaned back in his chair and laughed till the tears came.

"What *is* the matter with you?" she said.

"You are too good to be true," was the only explanation he would make.

It was Leroy who thought of the time. He pulled out his watch. "I'm sorry—sorrier than I can say—but I've got to take you to the depôt, madam."

"Oh, yes!" She stood up hastily. "What's the time?"

He showed her his watch. Her secret thought was: "We *might* have a quarter of an hour more by this beautiful fire."

It certainly was a bitter night.

She leaned out of the window of the automobile, taking the particles of frozen snow upon her face, and heard his special charges to the chauffeur. Leroy knew a better route than the chauffeur. He stood for some time debating the whys and wherefores. He was taking a vast deal of trouble for her. In those few moments his hat and his shoulders were powdered white. He tried to brush the snow off his sleeves before he opened the door. "What a climate!" he said as he got in. "I'm ready to admit I envy you."

"You don't envy *me*."

"Yes, I envy anybody who's going into decent weather. *Think* of what it'll be like!" He sank back in his seat and spoke of that sun-bathed world. He brought back things she hadn't thought of for years—things that made her laugh, things that made her long to cry.

Now they had stopped. The chauffeur was at the window. "We can't possibly get round this way. I thought we couldn't—"

Leroy, with his head out of the window, had a long

argument with the chauffeur. "Then go back," it ended. "Not that it will make much difference," Leroy said reassuringly as he pulled up the frosted glass.

"What were you saying? Oh! about the darkies. Do you remember Uncle Pax on the duties of husbands and wives? 'I think a husban' sho' ought t' do all he kin to make his wife happy and pleasant.' Do you remember"—he laid his hand over hers. She drew away. "I'm not to touch you? Oh! all right. There's one thing," he said in her ear, "whatever you've made up your mind to do, *you never can forget me—*"

"It isn't you that have put that into my head. I've been thinking it all these days. Ever since I got back. And before that. I kept thinking it in England."

"No," he began, with a kind of persuasive eagerness, "not when you were with Michael!"

"Even when I was with Michael."

"*Dear!*"

She waited.

"All the same, you know—you can't go on living alone."

Her heart beat fast. It was coming—he was going to say it now.

"Camilla—"

With a jolt and a jar the crawling automobile stopped.

"We've stuck in a drift," she said to herself. Leroy let down the window. They weren't in a drift. They were at the station. There was Mr. Marriott waiting to say good-bye—tall and spare and preternaturally grim behind those reflectors. He disapproved of her being seen with Leroy—that was why he looked like that. And there was Jeannette with the suit-cases. Why wasn't she in the Pullman getting things ready?

"How much time have we?" she asked Mr. Marriott, as Leroy handed her out.

"All the time you choose to take. Your train left nine minutes ago."

"Gone!"

"Are you sure?" Leroy seemed unable to believe it, till he had questioned a porter. He stood talking to the man, earnestly, reproachfully. He came back with the porter, discussing the state of the streets.

"The poorest little capital in Europe," he said, in a challenging way to Mr. Marriott, as though the situation were in some way the fault of the Minister to the poorest little capital—"there isn't one that hasn't a better municipal government than we have. Now, in Berlin, in any German city, all this would be cleared away in twenty-four hours." He opened the door of the automobile and held it, looking towards Camilla. He seemed to think he was going to take her back.

Mr. Marriott stepped forward. "I advise you to come with me. I've got a hack waiting."

"A *hack!*" Leroy laughed. "An auto is bad enough, but a hack!"

"Something to say to you." Marriott's undertone was so grave that Camilla fell back again from the freedom of attained majority to the status of the naughty child. He was going to scold her. She longed to escape from him . . . to go back with Leroy. She knew that whatever she did in the future, she mustn't do that now. And so, good night to him and into the draughty, lumbering old hack, with those disapproving spectacles. Fortunately the maid had to come too.

At funeral pace they made the progress back. Camilla broke the oppressive silence. "I am afraid you've been waiting a long time in the cold."

"No, only a few minutes. I knew you wouldn't be in time."

The reply angered her. "You couldn't possibly have known that!" His silence said too much. "Leroy is not responsible for the state of the streets!" And then she relented. "It was kind of you to think of coming to see me off."

"That wasn't what I came for."

Oh, well, if he was determined to be disagreeable—

When the hack drew up, Leroy stood there. "I told you I should get here first!"

A swing of glass doors and a great tide of heat rushed out to meet them. It was no confidence, but Leroy whispered:

"It occurred to me you'd like to have your same rooms. I was just in time."

On their way to the elevator she turned, suddenly remembering Marriott. Yes, following with something watchful, curious in his face. "I shall try for Washington tomorrow," she said, and held out her hand. He didn't seem to see it, the watchful look was scouring the lobby. "Good night, Leroy."

Leroy lowered his voice. "You aren't going to bed right away? You wouldn't sleep. Not a wink. Let's have some supper. I'm ravenous. He stood barring the way to the elevator—the old triumphant light in his eyes.

"One moment," said Marriott's voice over her shoulder.

"As I told you, I didn't go down to see you off. I had dropped in here to look for a friend who was due on the *Andalusia* this evening. And I heard a man at the desk asking for you."

A man! She turned sharply.

"I introduced myself as a friend of yours. I said I thought it quite on the cards"—across Camilla's shoulder the cynical eyes rested an instant on Leroy—"quite on the cards that Mrs. Trenholme would be in after twelve. Indeed, I hoped to have the privilege of escorting her—"

"You don't"—her glances flew from one to another of the few lingerers—"you don't mean it was—"

"The gentleman," Marriott observed with his most detached air, "said his name was Nancarrow."

"Where?" cried Camilla.

"I said I would let him know." With the same deliberation Marriott half turned. "Will you go up or wait here a moment?"

"Since Mr. Marriott is willing to carry messages," Leroy flung in, "perhaps he will be good enough to say that Mrs. Trenholme can't see the gentleman at this hour." The floor of the lobby seemed to swing up, swing down, like a ship's deck in a storm. Leroy's eyes, bright with anger, were full on the other man's face. "Or, if Mr. Marriott won't tell him, perhaps you'd like me to?"

"No, no!" Camilla put out her hand.

Leroy came close. "I thought you said you'd cabled."

"I did. I don't understand—"

"You told him expressly, you cabled him, he was not to come. And he is here! Infernal insolence, *I* call it!"

"Hush!" Again her eyes went flying from face to face among the passing few.

"Does he think," Leroy demanded, "that he has only to appear—?"

"Where is he?" asked Camilla, very low.

"You surely aren't going to see him at this time of night?"

"Yes, I am going to see him."

Leroy turned on his heel. Without another word or look he left the hotel.

Mr. Marriott had walked away, too, without "good night."

And coming towards her—Michael.

No one to look at him would guess at any significance in the meeting. He had his hat in one hand: he held hers in the other. He was smiling.

"But I . . . I—"

"Yes, I know." He looked round. "You've got a sitting-room?"

"Didn't you get my cable—saying not to come?"

"And your cable saying 'come.' That's the one I've answered."

"O Michael—" She stopped. He must have known she was on the verge of breaking down.

His eyes, as if to warn her, went to the two solitary figures over by the desk. "Some other place," he suggested.

"I . . . had a sitting-room. But I gave it up." Not for worlds would she trust herself alone with him. "You see—I was going away."

"Going away!"

She nodded.

"Coming back to England?" The light in his face!

"No."

Side by side they moved in silence over thick piled carpets, through a heat that made the head feel light as a toy balloon. When they came to a standstill, they were near an angle of that great nondescript place they call the "lounge." No one there—not one in sight but their two selves, and of the two, Michael Nancarrow, now, wore most the look of strain.

To screen the cushioned corner, he drew in front of it a chair for himself. "Sit down, my darling."

The single word, in that beautiful steadfast voice, brought an added anguish into her throbbing throat.

"You mustn't waste kindness, Michael," she whispered, as if the place were full of people. "You'll be stern and angry enough when you know. Oh, what *made* you come!"

"I could feel you were in trouble. So of course I came."

"You make it much, much harder for me."

"I shall try not to."

"You can't *help* making it harder." She clenched her hands in her muff. "Just to *look* at you makes it harder! But," she leaned toward him, "I've got to tell you—" She stopped suddenly, drew one hand out and

pressed it over her eyes. But not even by dint of shutting out Michael's face, could she tell him—not yet, that she was going back to Leroy. All she could bring herself to say, tonight, was: "I can't marry you, Michael."

And he, quickly: "Why—?"

Her hand fell down. "Because I *am* married." She looked at him with such shrinking that he exclaimed:

"It wasn't legal—your divorce?"

"Oh, it was legal. But . . . law and lawyers don't seem to have anything to do with such intimate things. I mean, can't change them. It's like saying by law you are to go back to a state of ignorance. How *can* you when you've once known?"

"Others can find a way out of the mistake."

"Yes, Linda—the woman Leroy married. Heaps of people can."

"And you . . . so can you, for my sake, and for your own?"

"The truth is, I go on thinking of Leroy as my husband."

"That's only because I've left you alone here. I shan't do it again."

"I felt it at Nancarrow." If she had looked in his face her heart would have failed her. But she sat with shoulders drooped and lowered eyes—a weariness upon her that was more than any weariness of the flesh. A weariness of the soul that looks back upon long conflict.

"Once in a while," the toneless voice went on, "I forget the other woman. In all these six years those have been the best times—when I forgot the other woman."

No sound. So even Michael saw now the hopelessness of Hope. She raised her eyes that she might read the sign of renunciation in his face, and found instead a passion of pain, something terribly alive and struggling, something that refused to die.

"*Michael!*" she cried. "Oh, I wish I'd never been born!"

He lifted his hand. But he waited for a moment, before his voice obeyed him. "Don't say any more tonight. You are too tired. Come—"

She followed blindly. When he stopped, she stood still beside him. Through the grille in front of them she could see the shadow of the elevator coming down.

"Sleep first," he was saying. "I'll come back in the morning."

. . . . . .

Coming back in the morning!

He would need be early to find her.

Yet before she had left her rooms, the telephone! She stood hesitating. What voice should she hear? Which of those two—?

She turned from the domineering insistency and ran into her bedroom. Her hat, her coat flung on, and she fleeing out of the place at the second summons.

For a couple of hours she walked the snowy streets. Twice, in 59th Street, she passed the house that once had been hers and Leroy's. Each time, as she went by, she slackened pace. Leroy had gone down town long ago. It was safe to linger. The second time she passed, the door opened, and out came the figure she was waiting for. A little girl of five or six, dressed in white. White fur coat and cap, white leggings, white gloves. Short, red-gold curls framed Linda's face in little. Camilla made excuse to stop and turn up her collar, looking over it at the child.

Could she live with that little Linda face? Could she be kind and loving to a Linda face? The child passed, speaking French to her *bonne*. Camilla looked after the small white figure. Poor child! what burden did she, all unconsciously, carry? How long would she move so lightly in a pure white world? In the days to come would she be walking at Camilla's side? Camilla followed her, trying to picture a future in which that figure would be always "there." Camilla's own main aim and

purpose, if she "went back," must be to forget Linda. And always, always there, in little—as though diminishing by distance yet never gone—always, Linda in the picture.

If James Trenholme was right, that would be Camilla's punishment.

"Deserter!" She stopped, with a sense of sharp collision. As if in that darkness in which her mind groped she had run into a wall. And so she had. A wall that rose round her on all sides. A wall, as it might have been, placarded: YOUR DOING. If you hadn't "deserted," more than likely the little Linda would never have been launched on a world that eyes her askance and murmurs "Hickson." If she "had been" at all, she'd have been Hickson openly.

Camilla's doing.

"Your job," as James Trenholme said, with no idea that part of it would be helping innocence to expiate the sin of others.

. . . . . .

She never could clearly recall what became of the hours till she turned into some place where shop-girls went for food. The woman who waited on her was angry because Camilla wanted only coffee. And the time was nearly two. She would have stayed and rested there, only the woman hated her. It was bad for people to hate one another. She would go away. The woman's face, staring at the tip, followed Camilla down the street.

Two blocks away from the hotel she saw Michael coming towards her. She had known he wouldn't be far—so she told herself with bitterness. Heavy-eyed, heavy-footed, she looked about with dread for the Other.

No sign.

They walked along side by side, she and Michael. He had never seen the snow like this, in great breast-works. Then he spoke of the storm he encountered coming over. After a little: "Nancarrow sends you love." He had

been there up to last Friday morning. "It's only six days away from us"—as though it were not farther than the farthest star.

"You didn't wait to get my letter?" she brought out at last.

"No, my darling, of course I didn't. What I wanted wasn't a letter. It was you—"

"If you knew what I'd said in my letter you'd never have come."

"Wait!" He managed to smile. "We'll speak of that—but not out here."

It jarred on her that he could smile. And how was she going to *say* what had been barely possible to write? She had leaned upon that letter to befriend her weakness, to speak for her. "Oh, you wouldn't laugh if you'd read my letter!"

Still he smiled. "Such a Gorgon letter, was it, dearest? Then I tell you what: when the letter comes we'll burn it together, you and I. Without opening it."

Half a dozen yards from the end of the block she stopped. Just round the corner was the entrance to the Ritz.

"Michael!"

"Yes?"

"You saw I was tired last night. I'm tireder still today."

"I see that—"

"Then you mustn't mind that I don't ask you to come up." The mere looking into his eyes brought a rush of tears into her own. "I must lie down," she pleaded. "I didn't sleep, Michael—"

"Nor I."

"Oh, don't waste any more time, don't waste any more lovingness on me . . .!" For all the mute misery of his face, there was something unyielding in it that angered, steeled her. "It's no use—no use, I tell you!"

His eyes fell for a second. When they lifted there was

no weakness in them. "You haven't come back to find you love Leroy?"

"It isn't a question of love now."

"Then it isn't a question at all. I've come a very long way to see you. You can't expect me to stand out here in the street to speak about things that—"

She walked on. He thought she was agreeing. What she was saying to herself was: "I've got from here to where the corridor leads out of the lounge. I can't live through a prolonged struggle with Michael. Between here and the elevator I must settle it." They walked on, and met a broadside from the wind as they turned the corner. She had said nothing yet. She was too dulled even to be much troubled as to what it should be. She would be given words, given some share of this ruthlessness that was abroad. Ruthlessness towards herself as well as towards Michael. The strain of colossal fatigue, the pinch of cold, the biting wind—that had frozen the tear-wet veil to her cheek—all was part of this strange new power of ruthlessness. It was that Power which made it possible for her to turn to him at the door and say almost indifferently: "When shall you be going back?"

"When shall I—?" He looked at her. "That's for you to say."

"If it's for me, then I say soon. At once. Why should you wait?"

"I can't answer that out here."

"But here, or in there, it's only the fact that matters. I can't explain things, even when I'm not half dead. But when you get my letter—"

"Letter! Letter! I don't care that for any letter when I've got you!"

"But you haven't got me. And some one else has!"

She had said it! Blindly she turned away to avoid his eyes.

"This is the door, Camilla." When it had closed he

was still at her side. And the wild Irish boy was in front of her with: "Mr. Trenholme has been here three times, 'm. He's upstairs now."

"Where? Not in my—?"

"Yes, 'm, in your parlour."

"You see . . ." she turned to Michael. "He's in possession."

Michael waited a moment. "I will be at the Biltmore when you want me."

The tears stood in her eyes. "I shan't want you."

. . . . . .

Her cold cheeks tingled in the heat. Her fingers could hardly unlock the door. When finally she had let herself into the little hall of her suite, out came a breath of roses and lilies to meet her.

She stood in the doorway. Yes, there they were. Roses and roses, and Leroy jumping up and coming towards her with hands out.

"Well, where on earth . . .! I began to think you'd eloped. Dearest child, what a face! Somebody been abusing you? I'll have his gore!"

"Leroy, I can't see you now. I'm too tired. Been walking . . . a long, long way—"

"What foolishness! You *do* need—"

She asked him to come back tomorrow.

He refused point blank.

She leaned on the back of a chair. "Please, Roy. It —isn't much."

"Well, I must say you *are* in a pretty state! Look here, if I come back in a couple of hours—"

"Come this evening. I'll be all right this evening."

"Well, will you swear you'll rest? And not see anybody else?"

"Not a soul. It's a solemn promise."

"Oh! it's *solemn* enough, to judge by your face." He laughed. "Tonight, then!"

"Not till nine. Give me till nine."

"Right. At nine. Here."

. . . . . .

She slept as if she'd taken a narcotic. She had to be waked.

She dined in her room, early, and dressed late. After the maid had gone down, Camilla, looking in the glass, saw with a start of memory, the figure in pearl grey. She had worn grey that Easter morning. There was here even a *chou* of pink panne, to repeat the note of that other hour. She pulled the gown off, and took the first her hand fell on, something she could fasten for herself. As she finished putting it on she turned again to the glass. "I shall look like that when I am dead!"

Well, roses for a first betrothal, not a second. And then it struck her that in her habit-like black gown, she had an air of the *religieuse* about to take the veil. Why not? She was making a double renunciation. First of Michael. Then of what Ogden Marriott had called the Secular Nun, who beckoned still to that sheltering solitude.

All Camilla's life certain phrases, certain words, held a peculiar magic for her. Good Faith had been one. And now Renunciation. She must make it—not parade it.

Leroy would hate this kind of gown. She began hurriedly to unfasten it.

His voice—already!

He'd hate waiting, more than the wearing of black.

. . . . . .

"Dearest!" He would have drawn her to him. "But how pale!" He covered her elusiveness. "Really, you know you *do* need . . ." He established her in the sofa corner. He pushed a footstool nearer.

"You're plainly in no condition to travel. What you've got to do, is to stay here and be taken care of." After all, he said, she'd be very comfortable here. You couldn't beat New York!

Nancarrow. Michael. Michael. Nancarrow. The

names kept ringing, calling, behind Leroy's light tones. Michael Nancarrow! She met it with the deep bell-note: Renunciation.

As if she were new to the great city, Leroy went on commending New York to her—in a dozen aspects, smiling persuasive.

"You don't seem as unhappy as you did," she said.

"As I did when?"

"When I first came."

"*Raison de quoi*—" He moved nearer. Something in her face arrested him.

"You don't," she began, "you don't seem to miss—" She stopped. "Leroy—"

"Yes, little girl?"

"If you don't miss Linda too much—I suppose you will let her go?"

"Altogether?"

"Wouldn't it be best?"

"*Much* best, if it could be done." His mouth took a humorous twist. "But women! You can't get along with them. And you can't get along without them."

"But you are having to get along without Linda."

"For the moment."

"But isn't she—hasn't she . . .? I heard a story about a Senator."

"Oh, yes, all the world has heard about the Senator."

"Even if there's nothing in it, you wouldn't take her back, would you, now, after—"

"Why not? She'd be taking me back, 'after'—"

With that old action of perplexity, she passed her hand across her eyes as if to brush away a palpable cobweb.

"But, Leroy—I've heard of . . . friction, quarrels . . . That's not true, then?"

"Why, of course it's true!" he said irritably. "I get on her nerves, and—God! *I* can stand being annoyed, but being bored is the devil!"

"Does *Linda* bore you?"

"*Does* she! Bores me sometimes till I . . ." He threw out his arms.

"Then you'll end it?"

"You mean get unhitched? What's the good?" he said, with that touch of weary irritability she knew so well. Suddenly he altered his lounging attitude. Not a word across her lips, but at something in her face he was on his guard. Deliberately he crossed one long leg over the other and moved his head uneasily from side to side. "After all, Linda . . ." he had an air of apologizing for her. And for himself. "Linda and I, we haven't either of us had a chance. We weren't brought up. Left to run wild."

It came upon Camilla with shattering force how close that tie to Linda must have grown, that Leroy should cast over her sins the same cloak he borrowed for his own—that dropped mantle of Motherhood.

"And, after all," he went on in a grumbling tone, "Linda doesn't bore me more than anybody else. Or as much, come to that."

"Did I bore you?"

"Why, yes, dear Camilla." His covert smile took on a twist of recklessness. "The fact is, women"—he threw up his head—"women as companions are a failure. Give me horses."

Out of the deeps of humiliation her voice rose faint and broken. "You can't be serious—even about this!"

He smiled again. "This is quite like old times! Well, I'm serious. Fire away!"

"Do you think—after all—maybe Linda won't want to come back?"

"Oh, yes," he said moodily, "she'll come back!"

"If you're sure—why, then, have you wanted me to stay?"

"What more natural? You are one of the most charming people in the world—"

"Hush!" With lowered eyes she stood up. "I see now. You . . . don't . . . want . . . me."

"But I *swear* I do!" He, too, was on his feet. He was coming to her.

Her hand went up. "And if Linda should come—"

"What then?" He smiled. "I might need you even more."

"*Oh!!*" She had drawn back only a step. But she stood, remote a moment, on some high peak of anger.

"By the Lord, Camilla! You look splendid. I've always said if once you were roused—"

All but in his arms, she turned and fled into her room.

After that—nothing, but the sound of a shot bolt.

. . . . . .

How Ogden Marriott found out, she never heard. But he was at the station the next morning in time to see her leaving for the South.

"You will stay the night at Washington? And you'll write from there?"

"No, not write. Not for a while. But you—will you see Michael for me and tell him?"

"What shall I tell him?"

She leaned out farther from the Pullman platform. "Tell him what you know about Leroy and me—"

"I think I have."

"And you must add to that . . . I offered to go back to Leroy. . . . And Leroy doesn't want me.—He would rather have Linda.—He is waiting for Linda."

The coloured porter begged pardon, and passed them to board the train.

"You are off in a moment." Marriott came closer again. He laid his hand on the rail. "Give me some message," he said, with a stifled earnestness.

"I suppose you haven't heard how soon he goes back?"

Marriott looked at her with the intent sidewise glance of the slightly deaf. Then, as though recalling the shape of the words: "He"? . . . "goes—"

"To England."

"Oh, Nancarrow!" he hesitated and took his hand off the railing. He stood for a moment looking at her. "Nancarrow's not going back—not for the present."

"Why . . . what will he do, then?"

"I asked him that. 'Write to Camilla,' he said. 'And wait for her letters.'"

She drew back, as a whistle sounded. "You couldn't have told him everything."

"Yes, everything."

THE END

JAN 22 1920